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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED MOMENT?

DARRAN JONES

Getting all my friends together for 16-player matches in my front room. It wasn't Mel's favourite moment, mind.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing: *Magic: The Gathering Arena*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Reading the main feature made me download *The Master Chief Collection*. I very nearly finished *Combat Evolved* before the mag went to the printers.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service
Currently playing: *Halo: Reach*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

As soon as science invents a way for me to play it without my lunch escaping my stomach, I'll let you know!
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Magic: The Gathering Arena*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

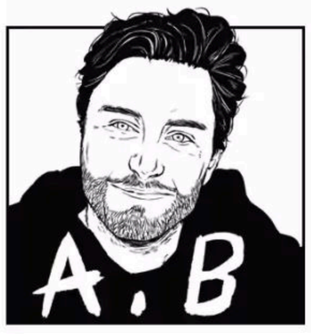
I remember Steve Jobs announcing it at Macworld 99.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord*... Modded of course
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

PAUL ROSE

Emerging from your crashed shuttle for the first time into what appears to be paradise...
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Guardians Of The Galaxy*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

PAUL DRURY

I have very clear memories of realising how clever the enemies were as they dodged behind cover or tried to outflank me. This was going to be a serious fight – and the Covenant won.
Expertise: Old coin-ops
Currently playing: *Cotton 100%*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

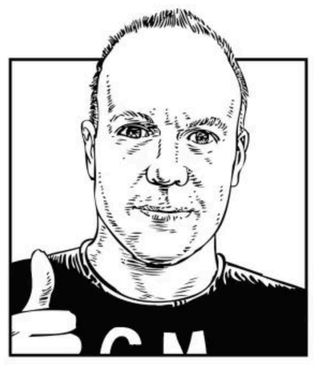


ADAM BARNES

Has to be when you step out into the snow level and hop aboard a Ghost... the pacing of the game just completely shifts!
Expertise: Being pretentious about coffee
Currently playing: *Halo: Combat Evolved*
Favourite game of all time: *Baldur's Gate*

ANDREW FISHER

The first time I was on a winning team in a multiplayer match felt so good.
Expertise: Over 35 years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Puzzle Bobble*
Favourite game of all time: *Paradroid*



GRAEME MASON

Finding out that I could sneak up on those little Covenant sods and elbow them to death, with love from the demon.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently Playing: *The Last Of Us 2*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

LOADING...

This magazine would most likely be a very different one without the 2001 debut of Master Chief. Before *Halo: Combat Evolved* arrived, Melanie and I were expecting our first child, so I sold off nearly all my games and began to embrace fatherhood.

Emily arrived and all was going well with my new life – until I spied a row of Xboxes in Southampton's Virgin megastore. The sheer power of Microsoft's console awakened something inside of me that had laid dormant for a couple of years and I knew I had to own one. I picked up several games but it was *Halo: Combat Evolved* that left the biggest impression on me – as I hadn't experienced anything quite like it.

It's a real pleasure then to be able to revisit this 20-year-old game and break down its many brilliant mechanics with several of the team that worked on it. It's also a real pleasure to share this month's gift – a 2022 calendar celebrating some of the greatest gaming magazines of all time. I really hope you enjoy it. And I hope you enjoy the rest of this month's content as well, from articles on *Lode Runner* and QuakeCon to *Nigel Mansell's World Championship* and *Rez*. Ultimately though, this issue is dedicated to the game that got me back into gaming. Without *Halo*, I probably wouldn't be doing what I do now.

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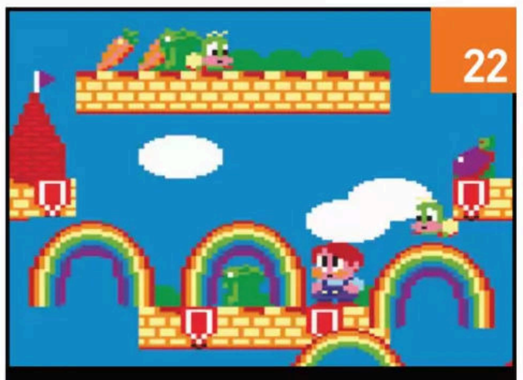

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The Infocom legend looks back at his lengthy career in the industry

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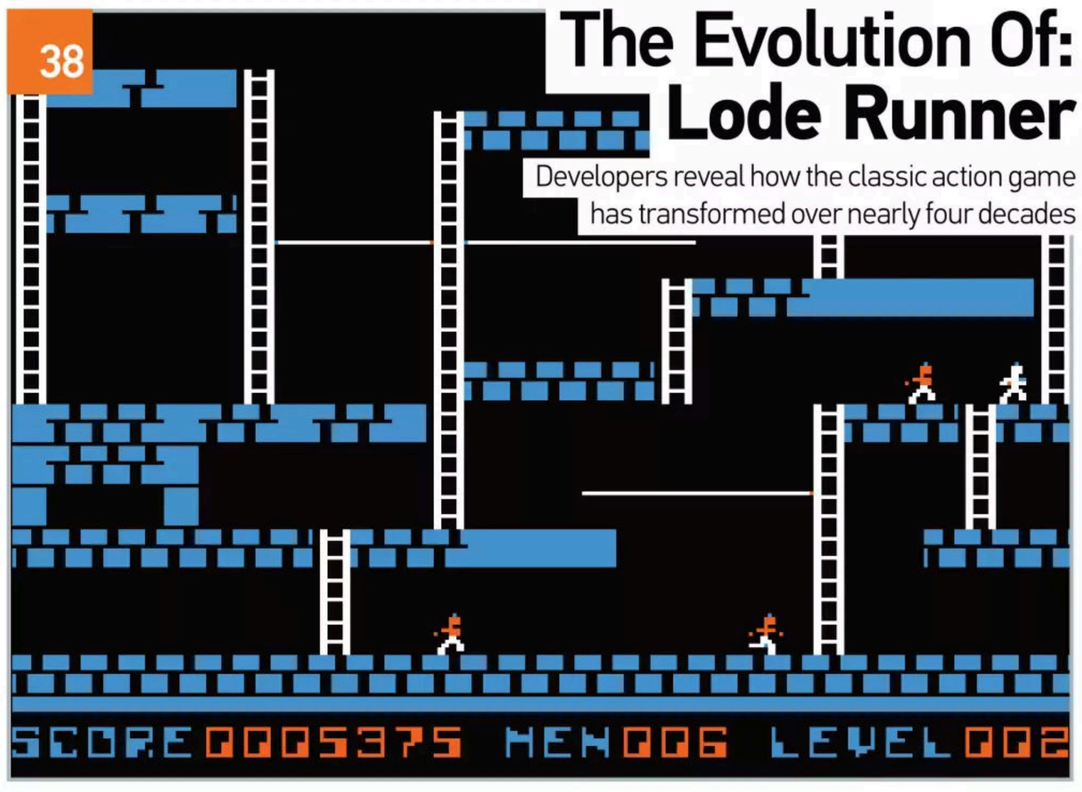
20 Years Of Halo: Combat Evolved

Ed Fries, Stefan Sinclair and other *Halo* veterans breakdown the key ingredients of Bungie's first Xbox game – from its multiplayer to its gaming innovations



The Evolution Of: Lode Runner

Developers reveal how the classic action game has transformed over nearly four decades

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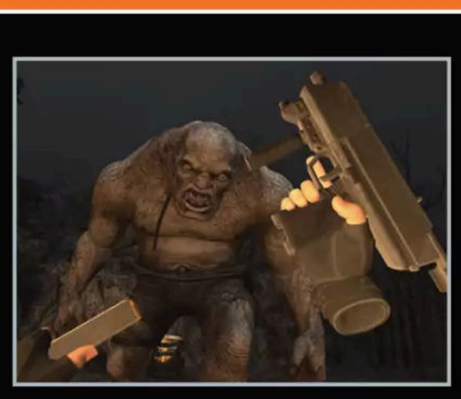

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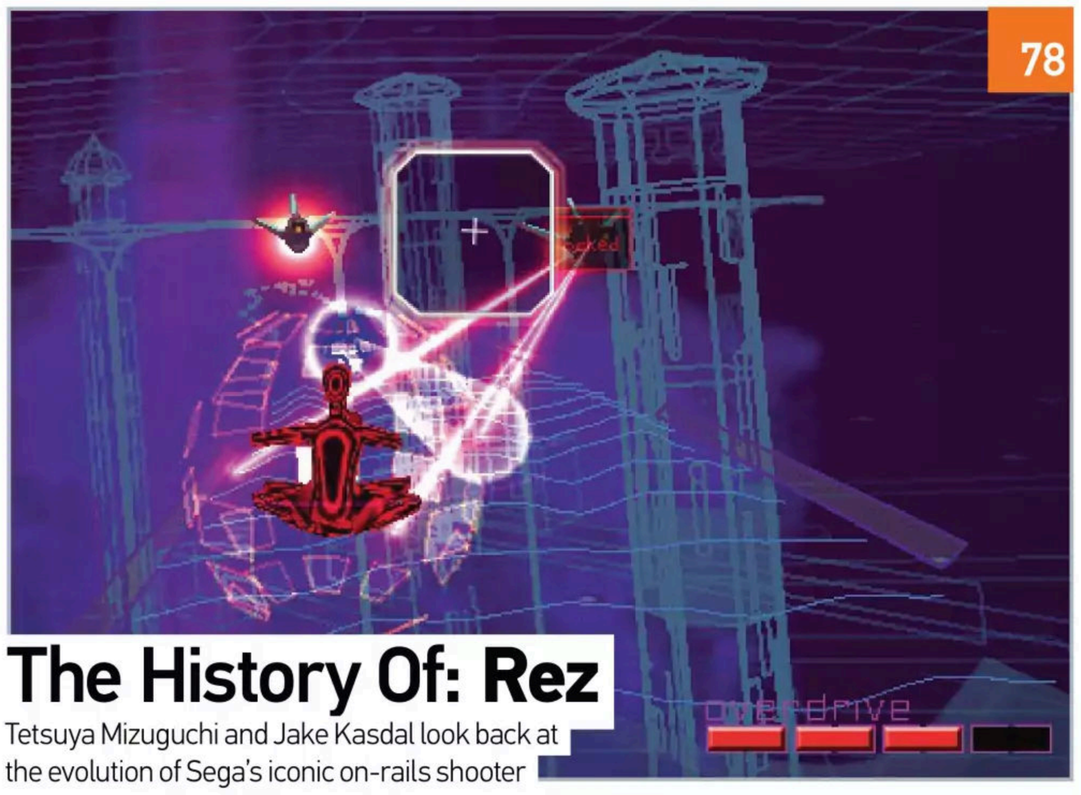

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The History Of: Rez

Tetsuya Mizuguchi and Jake Kasdal look back at the evolution of Sega's iconic on-rails shooter

» Check out the huge number of cabinets at the Play Expo!

THE RETURN OF PLAY EXPO

Graeme Mason reports on this year's Blackpool event

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Graeme Mason visits Blackpool in order to play a lot of retro games and report on Play Expo

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Paul has an announcement to make – he's officially retro!

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Nick continues to explore 2005 and finds lots of PSP coverage

It's been a tremendously challenging few months for the majority of the entertainment and events industry, and for the retro show organisers Replay Events it's been no different. Forced to cancel most of its plans during the pandemic, the company finally returned last month to what it does best – putting on a professional gaming show for eager retro punters. Housed once more within the cavernous Norcalympia Conference Centre at the Norbreck Hotel, Blackpool, this was an event that added little new compared to its previous incarnations – but on this occasion, that didn't matter. With the wealth of arcade cabinets, games consoles and pinball machines on show, there was plenty for the event-starved guests to play and enjoy.

"Last year was pretty awful," Replay's Andy Brown tells us. "Thankfully we have managed to run a few of the markets this year as well as support some festivals and EGX, so things are improving." The Norbreck, a relatively smaller venue and long-time partner of Replay, was the ideal location to kick-start Play Expo as we finally start to learn to adapt and now live with the dreaded COVID-19. Needless to say, safeguards have been put in place. "We wanted attendees to feel that they could socially distance if they chose to, so we purposely restricted numbers," explains Andy. "Had we run the show at normal capacity, I think people would have felt uncomfortable, and after talking to attendees at the event, I'm really pleased we made this decision."

With safeguards in place, visitors could enjoy the games, and there were plenty to enjoy. First greeting guests was the eternally-popular selection of Play Expo's arcade machines, now ferried up from Replay's permanent arcade in Milton Keynes, The Pixel Bunker. A huge range of Eighties classics were on offer, from stalwarts such as *Pac-Man* and *Frogger* to marvellous sit-down experiences like *Star Wars* and *Out Run*. "We purposely brought a large number of games that had never been at any events before," says Andy. "And lots of regulars commented on the variety of machines this year." Beyond the arcade cabinets lay a huge range of retro consoles from renowned favourites such as the PlayStation and Super Nintendo to an aisle filled with obscure curious like the Apple Pippin and Nintendo Virtual Boy.

Indie gaming was also well represented with Leda Entertainment's

» As usual, Play Expo catered to gamers across a breadth of generations.

» Sinden Lightgun were on hand to demonstrate its innovative LCD-compatible lightgun.

» Play Expo's range of arcade games proved as popular as ever.

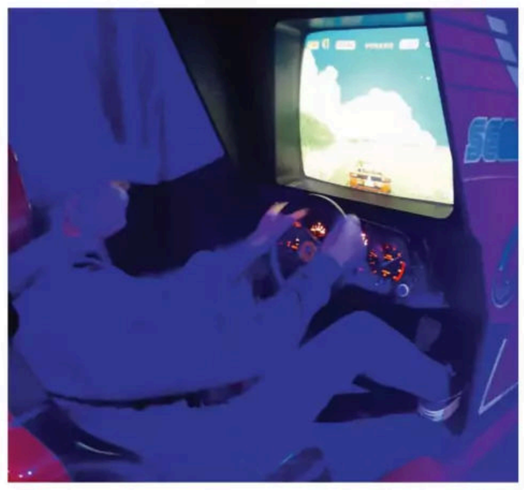
new multiplayer brawler *Bullion* and the thoroughly odd *The Cone Game* from Darkroom Games both on display. And it wasn't just PC gaming that got the indie treatment: the Game Boy game *D*Fuzed*, from Asobi.tech looked a pleasing little puzzler and should be available to Nintendo fans in early 2022. "It was great to be back at a retro gaming event after so long and it did not disappoint," says Asobi.tech's Asobi QuangDX. "There was a really enthusiastic response to *D*Fuzed*, cementing [the fact] there is a hunger for new games on old systems."

Another entertaining facet of Play Expo is its talks and panels, and these were also back, albeit slightly lower key than usual. Hosting the majority of these was YouTuber and presenter Trista Bytes. "It was lovely to see so many familiar faces again as well as meet so many of the people who've kept me company during the last year for the first time," says Trista. "The range of guests and panellists was brilliant and we nearly had packed-out rooms for most of them." From the panel of Antstream Arcade luminaries (including CEO Steve Cottam) to an entertaining Q&A with several retro YouTubers and a fun retro quiz, there was always something on for those wanting to take a break away from the glow of the screens. With the talks shifted to a larger room within the Norbreck to aid social distancing, back in the main hall, staff were regularly on hand with an antiviral wipe when a console or cabinet was not in use. "We also made the decision to drop some features we felt were high risk – VR and anything that caused crowding such as stage activity," notes Andy. "We felt we struck the right balance of keeping within the current government guidelines, meeting our own safety criteria yet still delivering a show that didn't feel cut down or overly restricted."

It's undoubtedly a difficult balance to achieve, and while anyone with ongoing concerns or worries about the pandemic is unlikely to find such an event relaxing, it's clear that the Replay team did its best to make sure attendees were as safe as they could possibly be while also offering up another fantastic assortment of games to play. Says Andy, "Feedback has been incredibly positive. Overall, I think people are just glad to have been given the opportunity to see old friends, hang out and play games and just feel normal again for a day or two."

Negotiations for further Play Expos are ongoing, and Andy is hopeful that the events will move towards normal service in 2022. While it's clear that things are never quite going to be the same again, it's most definitely great to see the popular retro show back. ✱

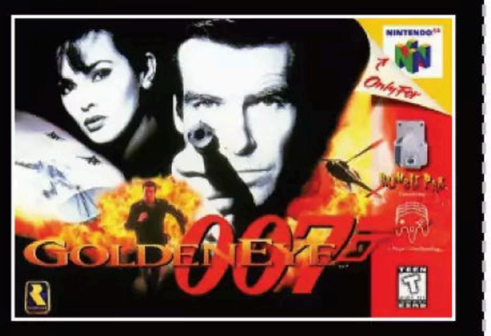
» A young attendee experiences the curious delights of *The Cone Game*.



» There's nothing quite like a game of *Out Run* in its original sit-down cabinet.

GERMANY REMOVES GOLDENEYE 007 FROM ITS BANNED LIST

There was startling news last month when German site Schnittberichte reported that Rare's *GoldenEye 007* was finally removed from the government's banned list of "Media Harmful To Young Persons". Quite what a 24-year-old N64 game was still doing on the list is anyone's guess, yet as the move seems to have been instigated from a request, it's logical to assume *GoldenEye* could soon be coming *to* the Nintendo Switch. However, given the console's recent travails hosting N64 titles, **Retro Gamer** hopes a remastered version of the game is on the cards instead.



THE SPECTRUM GETS A NEW DOCUMENTARY

Nicola and Anthony Caulfield, the minds behind the *From Bedrooms To Billions* documentaries are working on a new project about the ZX Spectrum. It will be dedicated to documenting the history of the famous home computer, from its rivalries with other systems to how it was exported around the world and cloned. Look out for more information next month.

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Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Memory almost full

I've been trying to think of a time before computer games entered my life. I'm 48 and a third, and it seems like they've always been there. There were key moments when they seemed to be more present, if that makes any sense – dad bringing home a Dragon 32 or us all traipsing to Rumbelows in Maidenhead to buy a BBC – but I think they must have been a part of me forever.

Let me try and make sense of these foggy memories and try and put them in order. The first thing I can dimly recall is the Binatone TV Master Mk 8. It lived in a battered cardboard box, and we kept it either under the sofa or in the airing cupboard. (I'm aware that not only the word 'Binatone' is meaningless to most people under 35, but so is the phrase 'airing cupboard'!) This orange and metallic box had a dial and several buttons on the front. It also had detachable joysticks. It's odd, considering my later love for gaming, but I don't remember being that bothered about the Binatone. Maybe because it was black and white, or the rather annoying sound, but something about it just made it boring to me.

At some point my Uncle Hughie showed me a colour football game on his telly. It blew my mind as being so realistic. I don't think he let me have a go, but I didn't care. I just enjoyed watching these perfect renditions of men kicking a ball about. I just this second Googled it and as I suspected it was ColecoVision *Super Action Soccer*. But here's why memories cannot be trusted and potentially everything I've ever written in this column is a lie. I could have sworn I saw this when I was six, around 1979. But it didn't come out until 1984. We had a Dragon by then, so games like this weren't new to me.

Handhelds were big growing up, and I'd certainly put them under the videogame heading. *Mini-Munchman* was a joy, as was *Astro Wars*. I was once in the audience for *Swap Shop* and The Carpenters were on. I was sitting just two feet away from Karen (although I was more excited by Bernie Clifton and his ostrich) and they gave away an *Astro Wars*. I couldn't date the machines though. I have no idea what age I was when I would spend hours with them on my lap.

Christmas could be a great time for getting new hardware, although there would always be one aunt who didn't quite understand what electronic games were and so would buy you things that LOOKED like handhelds. The disappointment when a rectangular box was opened only to find one of those plastic things filled with water and tiny hoops. You had to press a button to pump air in to try and catch the hoops on spikes. They were very dull, but now I think on it, incredibly addictive.

This month feels a little rambling and reads like a story my granddad would have told me. I've tried to use it to create a timeline of gaming for me, but if anything, it's left me feeling even more confused about what happened and when. Am I… am I getting old? *

> "Here's why memories cannot be trusted and potentially everything I've ever written in this column is a lie"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

I am retro!

I turned 50 not so long ago, which more or less coincided with the news that I'm going to become a grandfather early next year. Coupled to that, pretty much the day I slammed into that half-century mark, I developed arthritis in my hands. As signifiers that I'm no longer young go… it's a perfect storm. I myself am now firmly, and forever more shall be, retro.

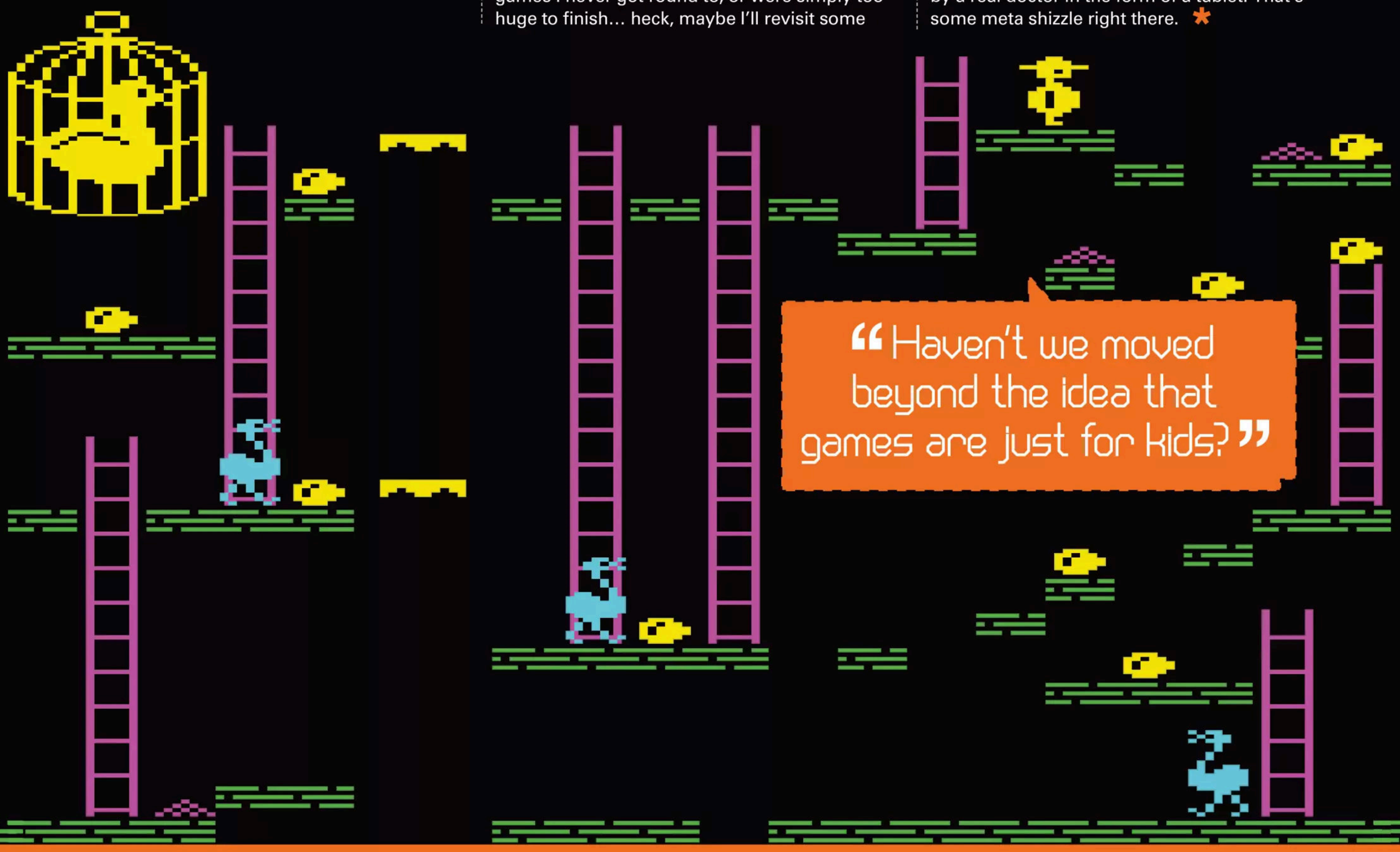
It has been quite the ride. The proverbial roller-coaster. Highs and lows. Wisdom acquired and innocence lost. Nevertheless, I don't feel my interests have changed enormously over the past 50 years. I still like *Star Wars*. I still like theme parks. I still play videogames, even if I somehow don't seem to have as much time to play them as I once did. I am, quite literally, a retro gamer. But then this morning I went onto social media, and saw a thread kicked off by some young whippersnapper asking whether he's too old to be playing videogames at 47. Yes: 47! I wish I was still 47! Can you imagine?!

Thing is, it has never even flitted through my mind that there was a cut-off point for gaming. Admittedly, my parents don't play games, but only because they never grew up with them. My dad never grew out of football, or cowboy films. He didn't hit 47 and decide they were childish pursuits, and it was time to grow up. How sad would that have been? Similarly, my heart aches for those who judge themselves for playing games at a certain age. If you like an activity, why stop? Unless, y'know, that thing you like is murder or throwing hens at walls.

Heck, I've been looking forward to the day I can retire and have loads more time to play games. I'm quite happy to spend the last 20 or so years of my life doing nothing else. All those games I never got round to, or were simply too huge to finish… heck, maybe I'll revisit some of the classics. Finally complete *The Hobbit*, or master the moves in *Mortal Kombat*. That seems like an excellent use of my twilight years.

Except… apparently old people maybe shouldn't play games, for some unspecified reason, according to some. What guff. Haven't we moved beyond the idea that games are just for kids? We're the first generation to grow up with them. Cut us and we bleed *Chuckie Eggs*. We should be setting an example to the young'uns. Heck, when my knees finally give out, I fully intend to get my walks in virtually. I shall live vicariously through Miner Willy's athletic bounding.

Whatever age you are, whatever you enjoy doing, don't feel you have to stop it just because you've internalised society's prejudices. I fully intend to still be playing games on my deathbed, by which point I expect them to come in pill form. Imagine that; *Doctor Mario* administered by a real doctor in the form of a tablet. That's some meta shizzle right there. *



> "Haven't we moved beyond the idea that games are just for kids?"

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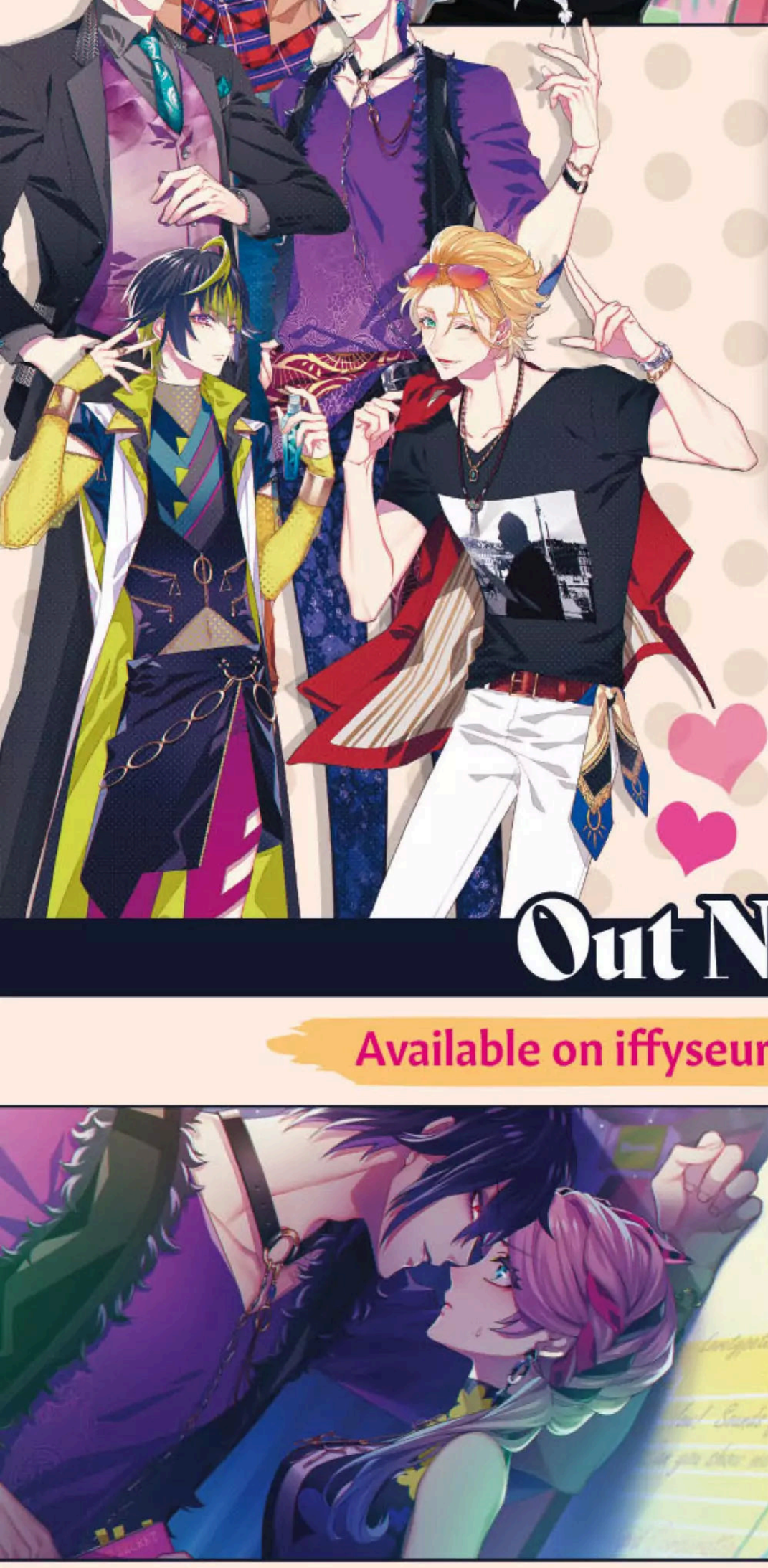

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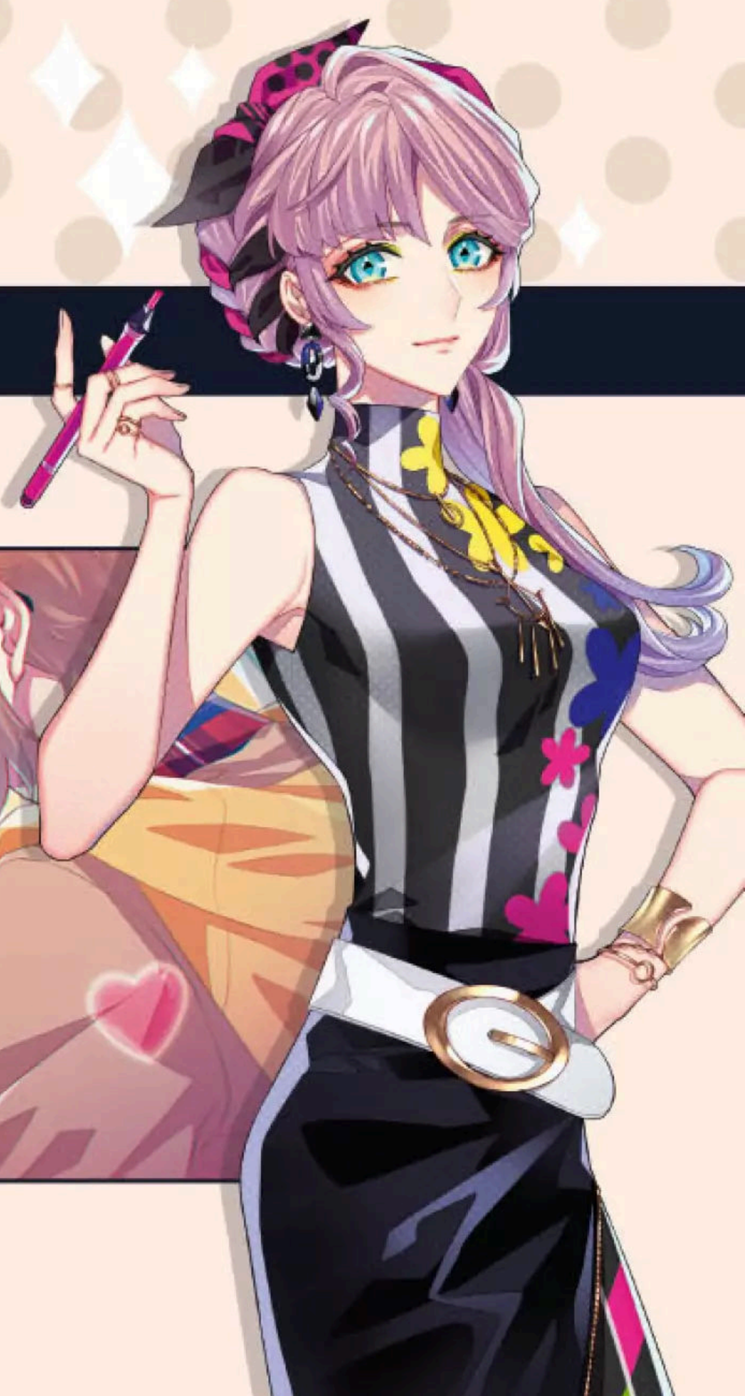

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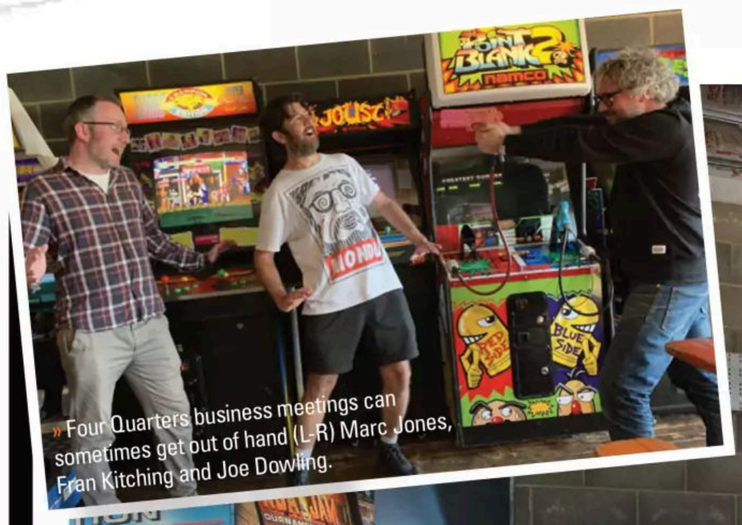
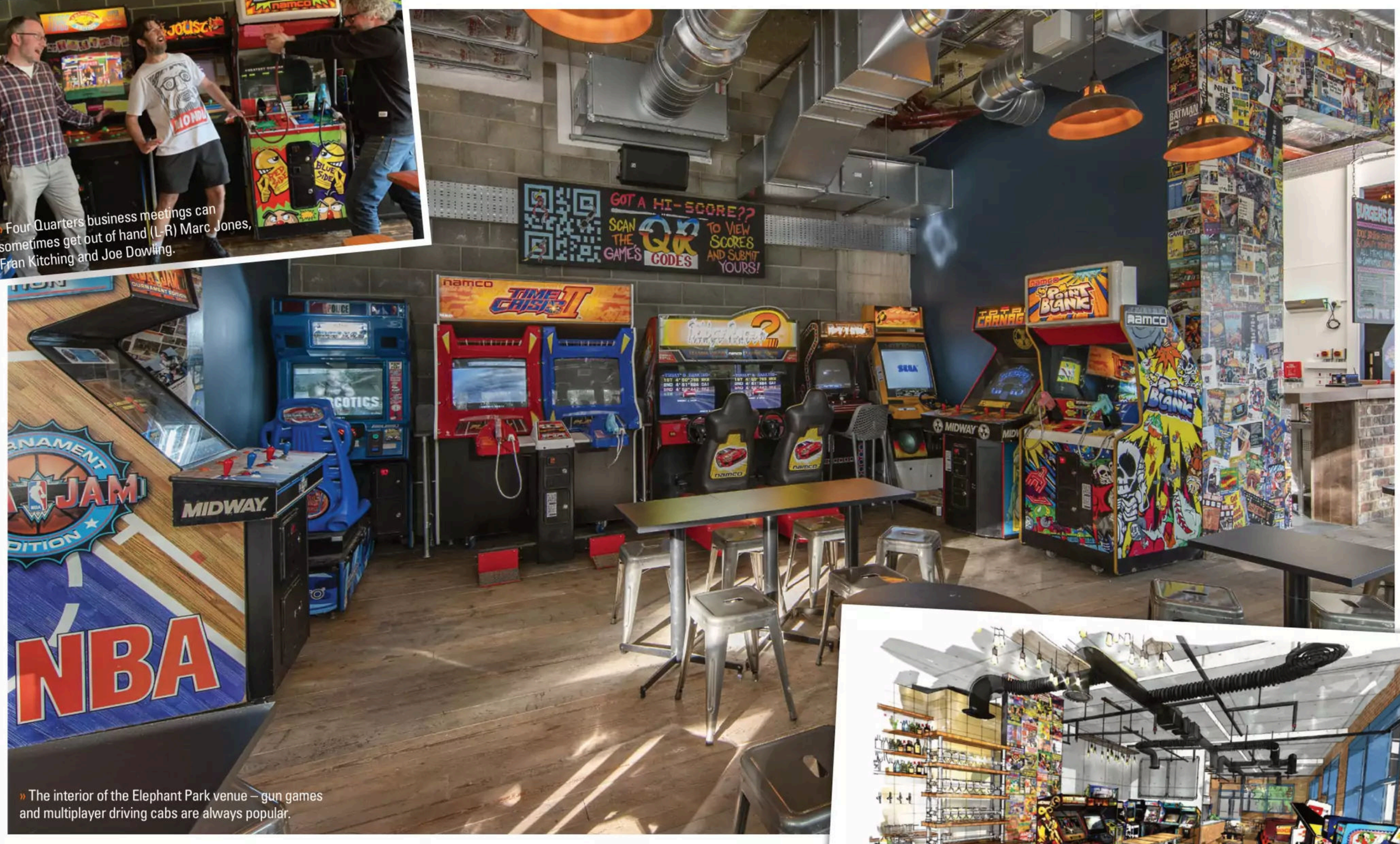


» Four Quarters business meetings can sometimes get out of hand (L-R) Marc Jones, Fran Kitching and Joe Dowling.



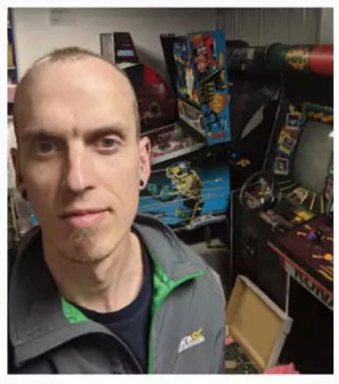
» The interior of the Elephant Park venue – gun games and multiplayer driving cabs are always popular.

» This artist's illustration of the recently opened Elephant Park arcade has a beautiful Seventies feel – as does the place itself, thanks to its *Asteroids Deluxe* and *Space Invaders* cabs.

Four Quarters

The founders of the popular arcade chain challenge Paul Drury to a four-player game of Gauntlet

If you like coin-ops and craft beer as much as we do, you should definitely visit a Four Quarters arcade and bar. Owned by five equal partners – Joe Dowling, Marc Jones, Francois Kitching, Tom Humphrey and Simon Dennison – they opened their first venue in Peckham in 2014 and now run three locations across London, with more planned both in and outside the capital.



» Tom Humphrey with some of his prized possessions.

What motivated you to start Four Quarters?

Marc Jones: All five of us have slightly different reasons but we all share a love for retro and a connection from our childhoods with arcades. For me visiting an arcade was the best bit of any holiday growing up and I still have vivid memories of the various arcades in Westward Ho!. When I started to hear of arcade bars popping up in the USA I checked to see if any existed in the UK. There weren't so I was determined to start my own and to do it right with authentic machines.

Joe Dowling: Barcade in New York are the pioneers, but we were the first arcade bar brand to appear in the UK and pairing games with craft beer seemed a logical step.

Francois Kitching: I'm from near Whitley Bay, a north-eastern seaside town where I spent far too much time in the arcades of the Spanish City in the early Nineties. I loved that place and I think Whitley still feels the repercussions of its closure. Fast forward lots of years and I was lucky enough to be travelling in Japan and my love of arcade gaming was reignited. I discovered that gaming cafes were a thing over there and I realised social gaming could be a viable business back here in the UK.

Tom Humphrey: I have a passion for old videogames in a social environment. I have never been much of a solo gamer and always enjoyed videogames with friends, plus I love the preservation of old technology. All of these reasons helped push me in the direction of opening an arcade myself.

What was your involvement with the retro scene before opening your first arcade?

TH: I was an avid collector of retro console related items and used to run a company called Hand Baked Arcade. For many years, I was well known for taking retro consoles, CRTs, projectors and decor to nightclubs and

» You'll find *Ms Pac-Man* at Four Quarters' Hackney Wick location. Why not try to set the local high score?

bars to install temporary, often one night, setups for different events. From there I opened Retro Game Base, a dedicated retro videogame store, with fellow Four Quarters owner, Joe.

JD: We sold retro games, consoles, computers and related stuff via our online store, before launching our physical Retro Game Base shop in Streatham in 2012. We always had the idea for the arcade bar business but we needed people to buy in to the concept. Running the shop opened doors and we found the other guys via an open call on our socials. Then we just needed premises and a brand!

How do you go about sourcing the arcade machines?

TH: I am almost wholly responsible for obtaining our arcade stock, with some added help from fellow Four Quarters owner Simon. To get hold of the machines we require is a constant labour of love. There is no one place to find these items nowadays, but a combination of all the common market places, relations with other collectors and arcade-related businesses, as well as friends passing on potential leads or items they hear of themselves. A few years back there were many more machines available on the likes of Ebay than there are now. One Ebay bargain I remember fondly is the *Lucky & Wild* machine. It was close to my heart due to playing the game a lot in the arcades of Dymchurch, where I grew up.

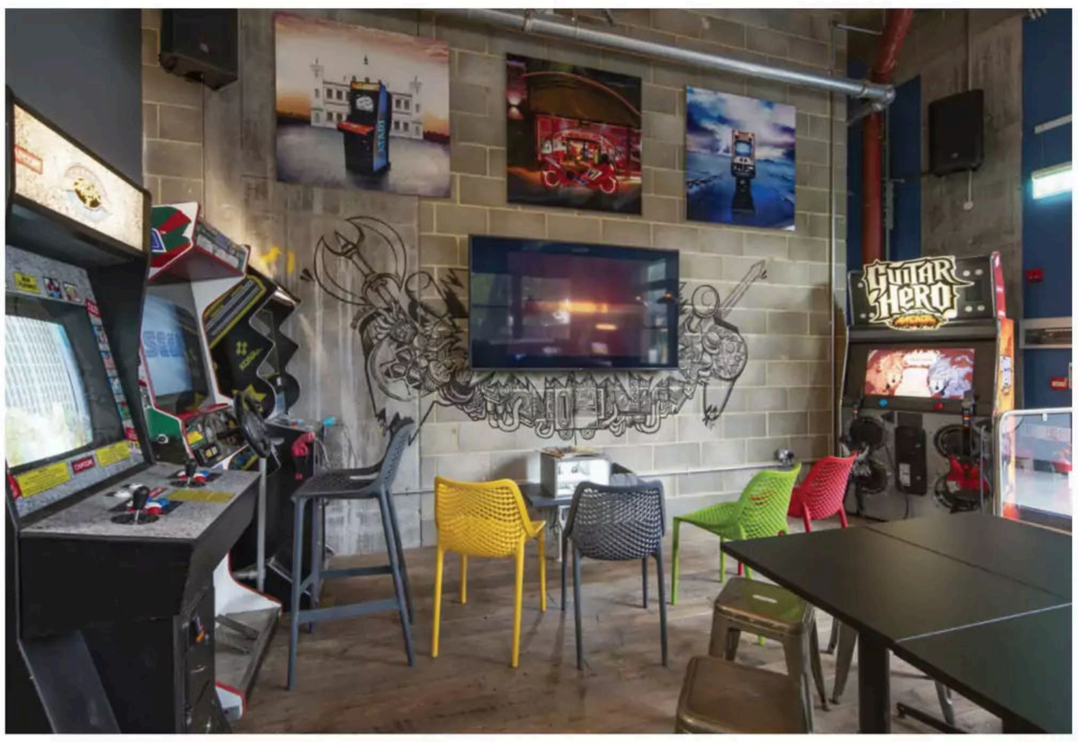
Keeping original machines, some over four decades old, in working order must be a challenge.

FK: I like to make the analogy that vintage arcade machines are like classic cars. They're beautiful, appreciating assets that take a lot of work, care and attention to properly maintain. All the games get played a lot and due to their age and our determination that they are kept completely original with CRT screens, no emulation and so on, the maintenance costs can be a challenge, but keeping the machines in top condition is our priority.

Which machines are popular?

FK: There are the obvious games like *Street Fighter II* and *Pac-Man* that always take a lot of coins, but our most popular games are multiplayer shooters and driving games, like *Time Crisis 2*, *Sega Rally* twin and so on. And the four-player beat-'em-up titles like *Turtles* and *The Simpsons*, they still munch coins like they always did – but at 25p a play, you can actually afford to complete them now!

TH: *OutRun Deluxe* is a beautiful experience. The condition of our machine, the movement of it, the music and of course the awesome gameplay is just excellent. *Shock Troopers* and *Cyber-Lip* on the Neo Geo MVS are two SNK titles I really like, with the added pull due to the Neo Geo's elitist nature for console collectors. We have a lot of machines in storage waiting patiently in line to be made bar ready. I look forward to the day the public see the likes of *Battlezone*, *Out Run 2* twin, *Killer Instinct 2*, *Tempest* and our *Judge Dredd* pinball, to name a few.



» The arcades have consoles as well as coin-ops on offer.

What kind of people come to your arcades?

JD: We run the gamut from students born well after the era our games were made, to die-hard arcade heads and everything in between. I've been pleasantly surprised how much the new generation has taken to our concept. We worried our original millennial customer base might be difficult to replace as they aged and settled down, but thankfully this hasn't been an issue!

We attended the opening of your most recent arcade at Elephant Park and were impressed by the machines and the venue itself.

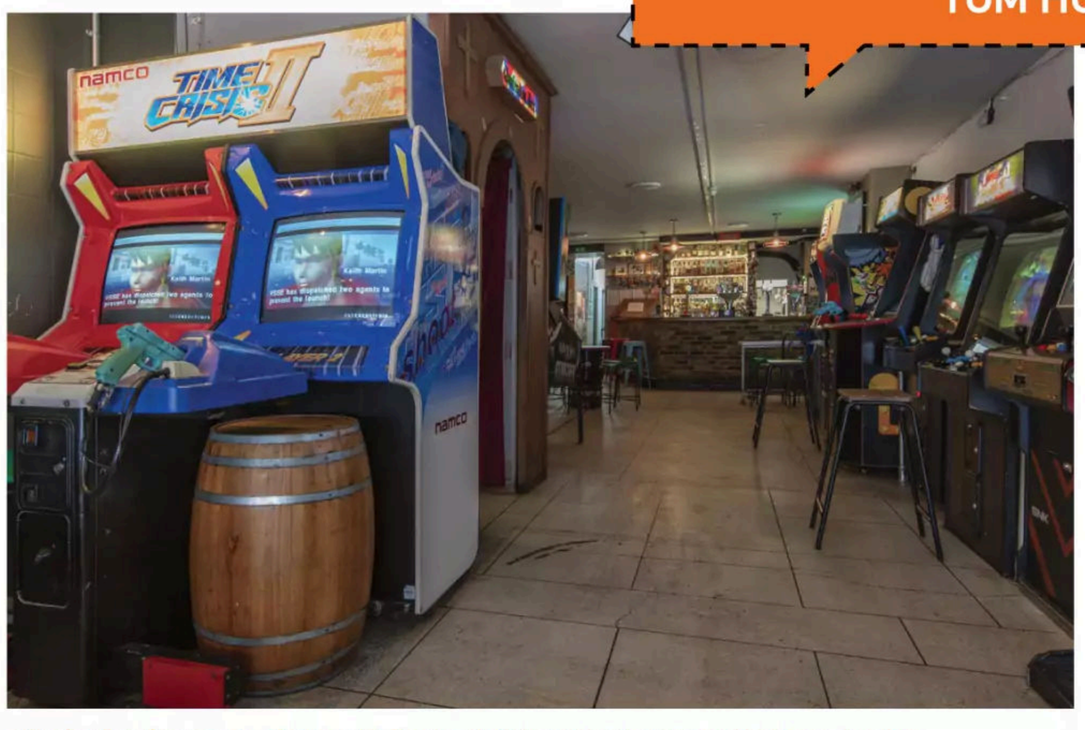
FK: Did you notice the SNES Easter eggs on your visit? We colour matched SNES grey from the body and sides of the console for wall paint and then the same for the primary colours of the console booths. They're based on the SNES controller buttons. That's the level of detail that goes into ensuring that we present our retro games in the best possible way.

Do you plan to open more venues going forward?

MJ: I'm happy to say we are definitely planning our next arcade bar and I'm hoping, with fingers crossed, that by the time this hits the shelves our first location outside of London has been announced. Check out www.fourquarters.bar to see where it will be and what new games we have put in.

All featured images are courtesy of Four Quarters. You can get more information about each arcade by visiting www.fourquarters.bar. *

> "We have a lot of machines in storage waiting patiently in line to be made bar ready"
> **TOM HUMPHREY**



» The first Four Quarters arcade opened in Peckham in 2014, proving that guns and beer can mix safely.

» The full-motion sit-down *OutRun* cab is one of many 'must play' machines at Four Quarters.

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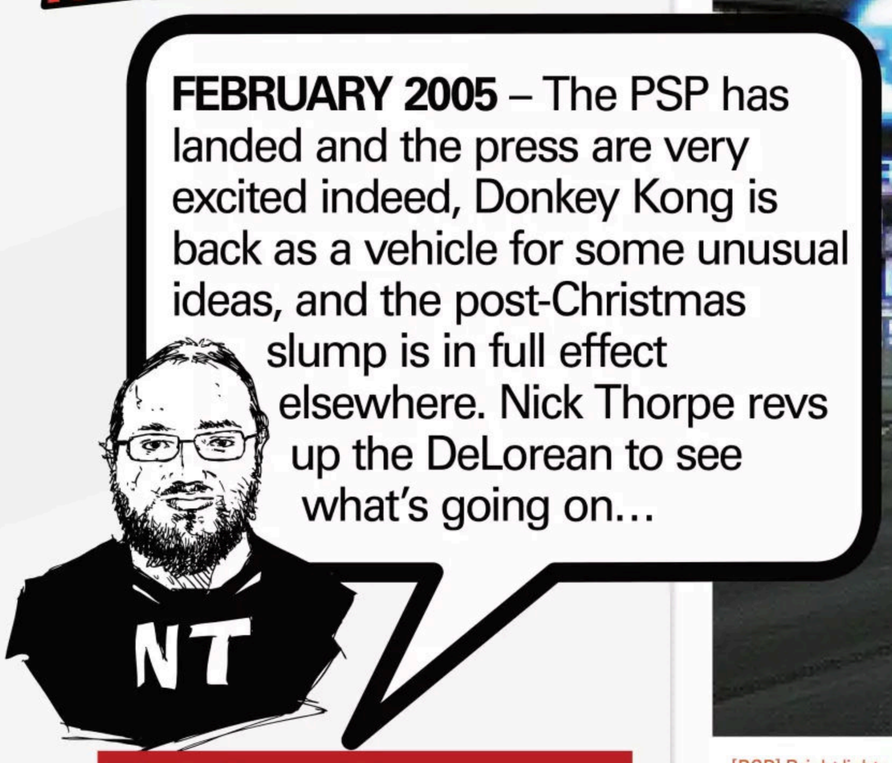
BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES



FEBRUARY 2005 – The PSP has landed and the press are very excited indeed, Donkey Kong is back as a vehicle for some unusual ideas, and the post-Christmas slump is in full effect elsewhere. Nick Thorpe revs up the DeLorean to see what's going on…

[PSP] Bright lights, big cities and preposterous drifting – *Ridge Racer's* PSP debut really did have it all.

NEWS FEBRUARY 2005

Sailor Ellen MacArthur set the record for the fastest solo circumnavigation of the globe on 7 February, completing a voyage of 71 days, 14 hours, 18 minutes and 33 seconds. Her record time stood for just under three years before Frenchman Francis Joyon, whose February 2004 record was beaten by MacArthur, beat it by almost two weeks in January 2008.

On 16 February, the first episode of the British version of *The Apprentice* aired on BBC Two. The reality game show featured businesspeople competing in team-based tasks, with the ultimate goal of winning a £100,000 per year job at Amstrad, the company chaired by the show's host Alan Sugar. The series was won by 26-year-old Tim Campbell, who became the project director of Amstrad's new health and beauty division until his departure in 2007.

The author and journalist Hunter S Thompson died at the age of 67 on 20 February. After serving in the US Air Force, he moved into sports journalism and found fame with his contributions to *Rolling Stone*, and most famously the novel *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*. Thompson had been struggling with both his physical and mental health, and made the decision to end his own life. His ashes were shot from a cannon at his funeral, with attendees including John Kerry and Jack Nicholson.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 2005

With the PSP having launched in December in Japan, UK magazines finally got their consoles and games this month – despite widely reported stock shortages. *Edge* took the opportunity to provide an opinion on the machine, claiming that it had "the looks, the brand and the price", and noting that "battery life hasn't proved to be the Achilles heel it looked for so long that it might be". The *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* was awed by the "beautiful goddamn screen" and noted that "despite horror stories on the internet", most of which related to dead pixels in the LCD screen, "ours turned up without a single cosmetic or technical defect". In *Play*, Tim Rogers wrote, "That's how I know the PSP is hot: because people won't stop looking at it on the train." The most universally praised game was Namco's *Ridge Racers*, which took the greatest tracks from the series and remade them for the new system. In *games™*, it scored 8/10 and was described as, "Even more perfectly suited to the handheld market than we might have hoped," and, "a clear warning shot across Nintendo's bow." *Edge* also scored it 8/10, hailing it as, "One of the best pure arcade racers to date," and *Play* gave it 5/5 in a mini review. *Minna No Golf* (*Everybody's Golf* in the UK) was also warmly received, scoring 8/10 in *games™* and 5/5 in *Play*'s mini review. *Lumines* was a surprise favourite, scoring 8/10 in both *games™* and *Edge*, with the latter praising Tetsuya Mizuguchi's first post-Sega game as "the only completely original PSP launch title"

[Xbox] The PSP got all the attention, but it's *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* that got the highest scores of the month.

[PC] That's a mighty fine ancient Egyptian city. Why don't ours ever look like that?

and "a block puzzle that celebrates the joy of light and sound". *Play* scored it 2/5, dismissing it as "something to do while listening to cheesy techno". *Metal Gear Acid*, a card battling spin-off of Konami's favourite series, earned 6/10 in *Edge* and was described by the *Official PS2 Magazine* as "the one we wish we hadn't bothered with".

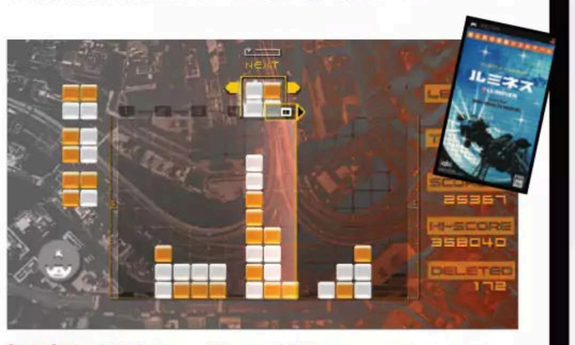
Nintendo had something interesting to offer this month, if you liked experimental games starring Donkey Kong. On the GameCube, *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat* used the *Donkey Konga*'s bongos to add a pleasing physical element to the control of a platform game, and earned strong scores of 7/10 from *games™*, 8/10 from *Edge* and 87% from *NGC*. *Cube* "enjoyed every single moment" but felt it was "way too short", and settled on a score of 8.0/10. The shoulder button climbing game *Donkey Kong: King Of Swing* (4/5 *NGC*, 5/10 *Edge*) wasn't so hot, suffering from what *games™* claimed in a 6/10 review to be "the most frustrating levels we've ever seen". NES games *Metroid* (8.0/10 *Cube*, 2/5 *NGC*) and *Castlevania* (7.0/10 *Cube*, 3/5 *NGC*) also made their return on GBA.

The DS wasn't quite so hot this month, though. *Ridge Racer DS* proved to be a surprisingly underwhelming counterpart to its Sony cousin, earning 6/10 from *games™* and 3/5 from *NGC*, with the former noting the digital d-pad control and analogue touchscreen control weren't "any substitute for the analogue control of the original game". One other notable DS release was *Mr Driller: Drill Spirits*, earning 6/10 in *Edge*, 3/5 in *NGC* and 8.1/10 in *Cube*, which called it "a great game" but "one of the weakest titles to highlight the machine's unique abilities".

On the PS2, *Play* really liked comic book adaptation *The Punisher*, giving it 87% for "balls to the wall action" and "gloriously blood-drenched detail". The *Official PS2 Magazine* favoured *Shadow Of Rome* which got 8/10 for "brilliant" battles, "passable" stealth and a "surprisingly cinematic, constantly fluctuating pace". Fans of tactical RPGs would be well served with *Phantom Brave* (7/10 *Official PS2*, 8/10 *games™*) and *Zoo Keeper* (8/10 *Official PS2*) was a solid budget puzzler. For Xbox fans, all eyes were on *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*. The action adventure game scored 9/10 in both *games™* and *Edge*, with the former highlighting impressive visuals, a strong sense of style and "bizarre weaponry that wouldn't really work in any other series". The *Official Xbox Magazine* was less impressed, giving it 8.3/10. Its review noted that the setting was "brilliantly realised", but claimed that the experience was "surprise-light" and while it initially appears to offer freedom, the game "changes its mind, pulls you back in line and forces you to get on with it".

On other machines, you'd have found relatively slim pickings. The only new PC game worth talking about was the Egyptian city builder *Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile*, earning 80% from *PC Gamer* for being "compelling enough to keep me monogamous" despite being "relatively stress free" and having "samey" scenarios. But hey, N-Gage owners got to enjoy the MMO *Pocket Kingdom: Own The World*, scoring 5/10 in *Edge* for "cumbersome" controls and menu systems. Even Dreamcast players got something with the release of the "diverting but skeletal" shoot-'em-up *Chaos Field*, which earned 6/10 from *Edge*.

That's it for another month – join us again next time for more tales from the front line of the new handheld war, and maybe some *Resident Evil 4* reviews too. ✱



[PSP] The PSP's fancy 3D capabilities were unnecessary for the simple but compelling game design of *Lumines*.

[GameCube] Nintendo's system is fading fast, but still delivering fresh and quirky ideas like the bongo platformer.

CHARTS

FEBRUARY 2005

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
2 – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)
3 – Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within (Ubisoft)
4 – FIFA Football 2005 (EA)
5 – Call Of Duty: Finest Hour (Activision)

XBOX

1 – Halo 2 (Microsoft)
2 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
3 – Call Of Duty: Finest Hour (Activision)
4 – Pro Evolution Soccer 4 (Konami)
5 – Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within (Ubisoft)

GAMECUBE

1 – Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (Nintendo)
2 – Need For Speed Underground 2 (EA)
3 – Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door (Nintendo)
4 – Donkey Konga (Nintendo)
5 – Tales Of Symphonia (Namco)

MUSIC

1 – Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own (U2)
2 – Wooden Heart (Elvis Presley)
3 – Like Toy Soldiers (Eminem)
4 – Soldier (Destiny's Child/TI/Lil' Wayne)
5 – Almost Here (Brian McFadden and Delta Goodrem)

THIS MONTH IN...

Cube

"However much money it has in the bank, and no matter how many GBAs and DSes it's selling, Nintendo cannot afford for the Revolution to flop," says Miles Guttery's editorial. "What's the answer? Aggressively sign up western exclusives," he continues, opining that *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Metroid* don't have the profile of *Halo* and *GTA*.

Edge

Now that Sega is a third-party developer, how does Yuji Naka feel about the influx of new hardware on the market? "Tired," he says. "We have nine platforms to develop for, it's too much!" He also mentioned that dealing with "hackers, bad users, illegal users" in *Phantasy Star Online* took up more time than developing additional game content.

NGC

Jeff Minter's GameCube project *Unity* has been canned, and the dwindling lifespan of Nintendo's console is seemingly to blame. The Yak is quoted as saying "realistically it was becoming unlikely that it'd be finished in time for anyone to want to publish it on GameCube. The alternative would be a rush job and we simply didn't want to do that".

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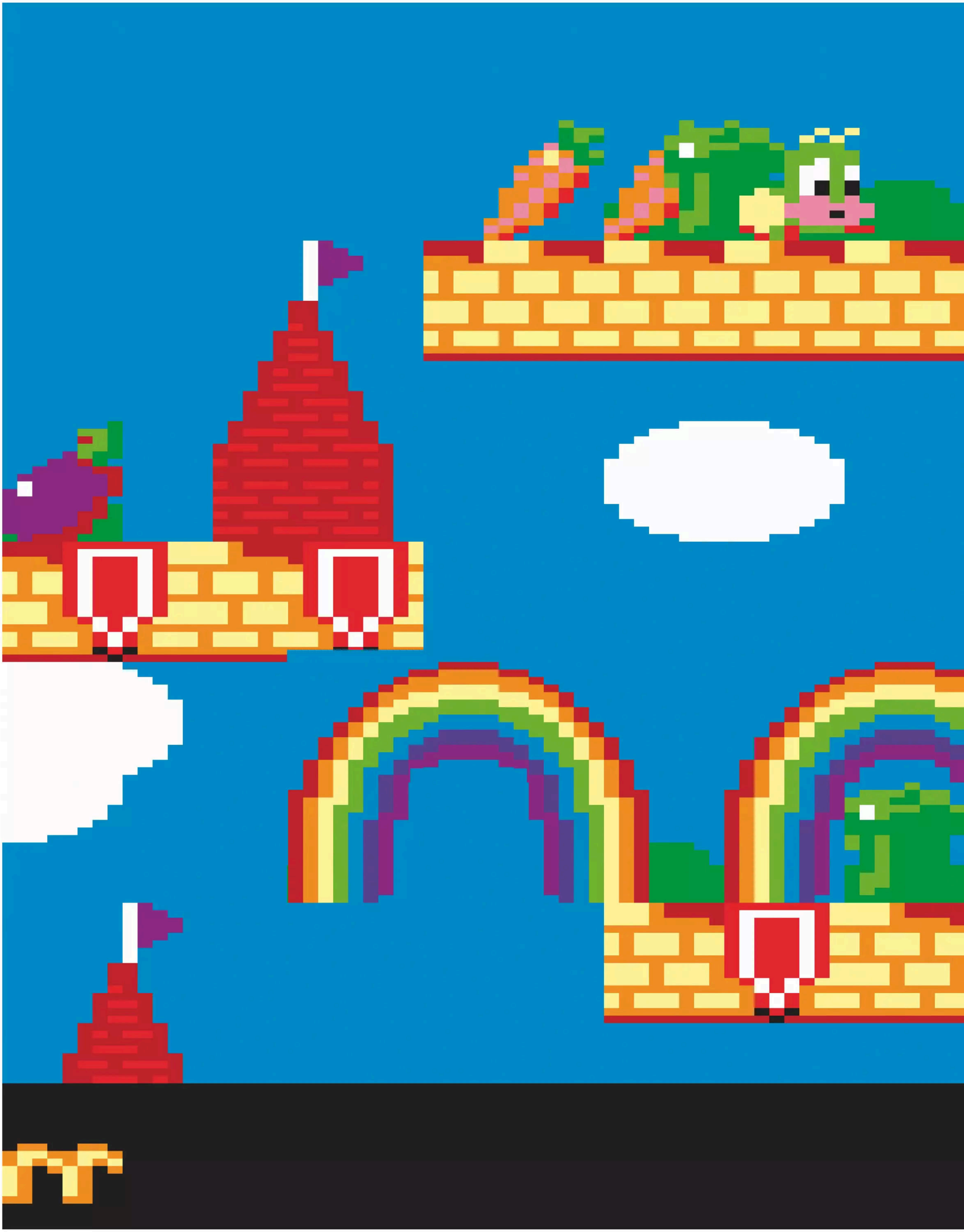


Rainbow Islands

NOW WITH ADDED MUSIC

RETROREVIVAL

» AMSTRAD CPC » 1989 » GRAFTGOLD

I always remember being a little disappointed with *Bubble Bobble* on the Amstrad, because it was a poor shadow of the original arcade game. It played well enough, but it just felt rather lacking due to no in-game music and some weak sound effects. It certainly wasn't the game I remembered from the arcades and that made me sad.

Thank goodness then for *Rainbow Islands*, a rather brilliant port from Graftgold, which was published under the Ocean Software label. All right, so maybe brilliant is giving it a little too much praise, but it was a bloody impressive piece of work. Although, if I recall, Graftgold was able to work its magic across pretty much every system it released the game on.

I'd own Graftgold's Saturn version of the game several years later as well as the rather good Mega Drive port (converted by original developers Taito), but on its original release the Amstrad version did me just fine. Granted, the scrolling wasn't super smooth and your character's movement could feel a little stiff at times, but it was great fun to play and I pumped hours into it.

While it obviously wasn't arcade perfect, it managed to do a wonderful job of capturing the colourful worlds of the original coin-op and its bosses and level design felt super accurate. At least they felt super accurate to 16-year-old me. Best of all it had a jaunty recreation of the original arcade theme courtesy of Graftgold boss Steve Turner and while it wasn't note-perfect, I'd always find myself incessantly humming along to it.

Andrew Braybrook was busily coding the 16-bit versions, but credit needs to go to David O'Connor (who also coded the Spectrum version) for his slick programming and John Cumming, who did a sensational job of capturing the arcade's colourful sprites. With the Amstrad often falling victim to quick and easy Spectrum ports, it was delightful to discover that Graftgold was willing to go the extra mile. It wasn't always easy being an Amstrad owner, but *Rainbow Islands* was one of the rare examples where you wanted everyone to know how good your version was. And believe me, I told plenty. ✱

20 YEARS OF HALO® COMBAT EVOLVED

WORDS BY **ADAM BARNES** AND **DARRAN JONES**

» [Mac] The very first screenshot of *Halo: Combat Evolved* that was released to the press.

BUNGIE'S HALO TRANSFORMED A GENRE WITH GAME MECHANICS THAT STILL RESONATE TODAY. HERE WE REVISIT THE KEY ELEMENTS THAT MAKE IT SHINE

It's astonishing to think that it has been two long decades since we experienced Master Chief's very first adventure. Released to critical acclaim on Microsoft's Xbox, *Halo: Combat Evolved* set new standards for console shooters, introducing numerous new game mechanics and delivering an exciting world to explore, either on-foot or in one of the many vehicles that were available. For many who were unaware of developer Bungie, *Halo* must have felt like a bolt of brilliance, completely out of the blue, but the DNA of Master Chief's debut adventure can be traced back to *Marathon*, a popular first-person shooter that Bungie released for the Mac in 1994.

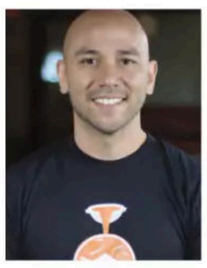
While *Halo* was rightly praised for its excellent combat mechanics, satisfying enemy AI, tactical combat and fantastic multiplayer options on release, Bungie had actually intended it to be a very different game. Development began in 1997 and one of Bungie's first thoughts was to create a real-time strategy game with vehicular-based combat. This eventually evolved into a third-person action game before becoming the hit first-person shooter we know and love today. And let's be honest, there's a lot of reasons to love Bungie's game.

Rare's *GoldenEye 007* had shaken up the FPS console market on release thanks to its clever level design, progressive difficulty structure and spectacular four-player action and it became the gold standard for console first-person shooters. But if we're honest *Halo* felt like it was in another league. Aside from its phenomenal visuals and majestic score, *Halo* introduced strategy, largely due to Master Chief only being able to carry two weapons, meaning you needed to know you had the right tools for whatever job was ahead of you. Vehicular combat played its part too, while the enemy AI (particularly on Legendary) made *Halo*'s combat feel light years ahead of Rare's spectacular shooter. The fact you could play the entire game co-operatively with a friend wasn't to be sniffed at either. Standout levels like The Silent Cartographer felt like you were really taking part in a large-scale, savage war, while the introduction of the Flood proved that Bungie still had the power to surprise you at such a late stage in the game. And then of course there was the sensational multiplayer which offered endless hours of entertainment and introduced many, many non-PC gamers to the importance of LAN gaming. The original *Halo* felt like a monumental event on its release and thanks to its *Anniversary* edition, released on Xbox 360 in 2011, it still stands up exceptionally well today.

Over the following pages we'll examine everything that has made *Halo* so special, from its superb multiplayer to its fascinating range of weapons and the many sequels and spin-offs that followed in its wake. Enjoy. ▶

MEET THE HALO VETERANS

ED FRIES
VP of games publishing, Microsoft Game Studios



STEVE ABEYTA
Lead environment artist

STEFAN SINCLAIR
Multiplayer programmer

ALEX SPENCER
Features editor, *Edge* magazine

JEN TAYLOR
Voice of Cortana

HALO'S LEGACY

EDGE'S ALEX SPENCER REVISITS HALO

What made you realise that *Halo* was special?
What I can bang on about endlessly is the visual language of *Halo*, which was instantly iconic. There's a layer of the dusty-grey aesthetics of military hardware, sure, but it's set against these locations with skies and trees and rock formations that took Bungie's home turf, the Pacific Northwest, and extrapolated it into something brilliantly alien. And how many shooters offer you vehicles that look like the opalescent shell of a beetle, and guns that fire glowing purple needles? And yes, unfortunately, the Flood too. But for a very specific generation of players, the *Halo* campaign was the equivalent of *Star Wars*' cantina sequence – a set of gorgeous toys that would live in your head well into adulthood.

Tell us about *Halo*'s most iconic mission: The Silent Cartographer. What made it so enjoyable?
I mean, for a start, what a name. I still think about it in my idle moments to this day. But much has been said about its structure, and for good reason. You start with this beach landing, then get to circle the island in a Warthog, working your way to its centre, and then you eventually descend beneath the ground. It's such a perfectly logical progression, the kind I can still roughly trace in my imagination. But the highlight for me has to be the moment that you encounter the Hunters. They're the game's biggest bad, and now there are two of them, in an enclosed arena. It's a brilliant escalation, a preview for what *Halo 3* would do in its famous double-Scarab sequence.

Do you think that Master Chief as a character had a hand in helping to make the game appealing?
As a character, Master Chief is – like Gordon Freeman, Doomguy, a lot of the shooter icons of old – pretty much a cipher. But he's a cipher with a very cool visual design. There's a chunky physicality to Chief's silhouette, which perhaps we can put down to the limited number of polygons he was built out of, but it's simple enough to be memorable. He's one of those few videogame characters that pretty much anyone could reliably doodle. You don't get that with 'Soap' McTavish, do you?

What has made *Halo* such a long-lasting franchise?
Honestly, the fact that so many of the subsequent games were just as good as the first. *Halo 3* landed another *Edge* 10, and I'd suggest *Reach* might have deserved one too. Those games might not have been combat evolved, exactly, but they were certainly combat bloody-well-iterated-on. In latter days, the series has faltered a little under the stewardship of 343 Industries, but the recent beta testing flights for *Halo Infinite* have shown that the fundamentals of its multiplayer are still rock solid. Development has clearly been bumpy, but fingers crossed for another *Halo* game worthy of the higher end of *Edge*'s scoring scale.

» [Xbox] *Halo*'s cutscenes and magnificent soundtrack really give the game a film-like feel.

INNOVATING A GENRE

THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER IS A LONG AND STORIED ONE, WITH HALO BEING ONE OF THE MOST IMPACTFUL TITLES IN THE GENRE. THE MODERN-DAY FPS OWES A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT TO THE INNOVATIONS OF BUNGIE'S BEHEMOTH. . .

What can you really say about the innovations of *Halo: Combat Evolved*? Where do you start to dilute down the minutiae of its smart game design into a single, unifying statement of the game's historic impact on an entire genre? Even Bungie didn't set out with that impact as a goal, as it initially planned a strategy game. In truth, its numerous innovations are just too vast to effectively present in detail, but on the other hand it feels – these days at least – a little like treading old ground. You see, the problem isn't that *Halo wasn't* innovative, but rather that it has gone on to have such a long-lasting and profound impact on the way we play first-person shooters – particularly on console – that we might overlook a lot of Bungie's work.

"Today we take dual-stick [controls] for granted on consoles," says Ed Fries of what he feels was *Halo*'s biggest contribution to the FPS genre. "But in the year 2001 it was something incredibly new. Many people were sceptical whether it was even possible to take a genre like the FPS, which had been developed for mouse and keyboard, and move it onto a console controller." Ed led the team behind the original Xbox and was instrumental in getting *Halo* and the Bungie team to join the Microsoft Game Studios family ahead of the console's release. Prior to that, Bungie had been a solely PC and Mac developer, and it had worked exclusively with the mouse and keyboard set-up and likely wasn't considering a way to innovate on its FPS stablemates' tried-and-true means of input. "There's a huge amount of innovation and subtlety in the work that Bungie did to make the player feel like they are in control and can hit what they are trying to shoot at," says Ed. At the time, the most notable console FPS was still *GoldenEye* and the variations it would go on to inspire. "The thing to remember about *GoldenEye* is that it was written for an N64 controller with a single analogue stick so it really doesn't feel like modern console first-person shooters," continues Ed. "I think *Halo* was the first game to make an FPS feel good on a console and prove that the FPS genre could be as popular on consoles as it was on PC."

> "I THINK HALO WAS THE FIRST GAME TO MAKE AN FPS FEEL GOOD ON A CONSOLE"
> ED FRIES

The transition over from PC to console didn't just answer the immediate question of how to port over the complexities of a 'true' FPS to a controller, though. This is where the myriad innovations in the gameplay came in, with Bungie distilling down just enough of what was then the core features of an FPS to retain that depth while making it more

» [PC] The Covenant's weapons feel suitably alien and take a while to get used to.

» [PC] *Halo*'s levels are quite vast so the game's many vehicles are a great way to traverse them.

» [Xbox Series X] *The Master Chief Collection* features the remaster of *Halo: Combat Evolved*, which originally debuted on Xbox 360.

» [XBOX] We wasted hours looking at the grass in Bungie's game. It added to the authenticity of *Halo*'s world.

manageable in a console space. For Alex Spencer, features editor at *Edge* magazine, it is this buffet of console considerate improvements that made the original *Halo* worthy of the fabled *Edge* 10 review score. "One of the things we look for in an *Edge* 10 is a game that pushes the medium forward. 'Revolutionary', as our old review policy had it," says Alex. "Today, you have to squint a little to see that in *Halo*. It looks like just another console first-person shooter, right? But that's because it invented most of the vocabulary of those games." The most notable of these is the recharging energy shield, Master Chief's primary health meter that protected him from fatal harm. There were still health packs to rely on – this was the early Noughties after all – but this was a crucial change that, decades later, has become the de facto model for FPS games, leading to war-grizzled veterans cowering behind cover just waiting for the red jelly impeding their vision to clear and all those bullet wounds to mystically restore themselves. But there were numerous other aspects too, such as the two-weapon limit that meant the strategic swapping of guns on the fly, or the dedicated grenade button for instant access to explosions. Along with its open environments, varied enemy AI and fluid access to vehicular combat, Bungie's game was infused with deep, strategic combat that allowed for a more personal approach to any given challenge than anything else at the time offered. "We all moan about games with colon-suffix subtitles," adds Alex, "but *Halo* was one of the few titles to ever get it right: *Combat Evolved*? Yeah, you could say that."

A CHAT WITH CORTANA

JEN TAYLOR TALKS HALO, MASTER CHIEF AND FINDING THE VOICE OF CORTANA

What direction were you given for Cortana while working on *Halo: Combat Evolved*?
The things that they said to me was that, "You're this man's lifeline, you're sort of the girl next door, there's no flirting, it's not that kind of relationship. You're the entity really helping [Master Chief] get through the game. We don't ever want you to sound like you're annoyed with him, you're working together, you're a team."

Did you enjoy your time on *Halo* and when did you realise that it had become a huge success?
I had a great time recording it because they were just such a fun group of people who were so excited about the game, but I didn't know how well *Halo* had done until they called me back and said, "Do you wanna do *Halo 2*?" So I thought, I guess people liked *Halo*! I feel like it gets bigger every time, because it's been around so long. The lore gets deeper, it becomes a bigger thing. Probably *Halo 2* was when I realised that people are really excited about this and I think this is when I first saw a little Cortana figurine and thought, "Oh, there's a toy!"

How does it feel to be the voice of such an iconic videogame character?
It's just a gift to get to play a character such as this for such an extended period of time and to check in with Cortana, if you will, for really intense periods… and then to just step away from her. Each game I felt like I got to know her better because I would have a year or two or three in between, and I would have to reacquaint myself with my little friend. I adore this character, she surprises me. It was an interesting thing to play the genesis and the growth of her more human side, it was interesting to play someone discovering that.

What's been your favourite moment playing Cortana?
That's a long list of things! You know, I think so much of this, for me – and for Steve [Downes, voice of Master Chief], we have talked about this – is going out and meeting the people that this game has affected. That is the really big takeaway from this. I have people come up to me and say, "This game saved my life, this game helped me to process stuff that I was not able to, this game made me feel strong, this game gave me a community when I didn't have one." Those are the things that I really remember. I imagine there are people who will read this and think that this is silly, but I promise you that I have so many people come up to me and thank me for just being a part of it because it has really given them light in a place that was dark, and that is what really means something to me.

MAXIMISING THE MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE

NOWADAYS, ONLINE MULTIPLAYER FPS GAMES ARE EVERYWHERE, BUT IN THE NINETIES THERE WERE PREDOMINANTLY ENJOYED BY PC OWNERS, WITH CONSOLE GAMERS ENJOYING SMALLER LOCAL AFFAIRS ON SYSTEMS LIKE THE N64 AND PLAYSTATION. HALO CHANGED THIS, AS IT EVOLVED NOT JUST FPS COMBAT, BUT THE WAY WE ENJOYED PLAYING THESE GAMES WITH OTHERS

There's no denying that at the time of *Halo*'s release, any new FPS worth its salt was essentially guaranteed a multiplayer mode. Online play was becoming an essential part of almost any new game, but shooters especially wouldn't achieve very much without it. And *Halo*, with its cinematic approach and rich lore, felt like its emphasis lay in the single-player, with multiplayer coming in as a feature to keep players hooked long after the credits rolled. But that just wasn't the case. "*Halo* was multiplayer from the very start," says Stefan Sinclair, a programmer on *Halo*'s multiplayer team. "In fact, for a long while, it was *only* multiplayer. For example when I started at Bungie in the summer of 1999, the only way one 'played *Halo*' at that time was to start up an instance as a server, and then others could then launch their instance of *Halo* as a client, connect to your server, and we all ran around in the world testing things."

As a result, multiplayer essentially had a direct impact on the pacing of the single-player experience, with aspects such as Master Chief's jump height, speed, gun controls and vehicle movement all designed first with multiplayer in mind. The team already knew it had something special with its multiplayer, but since *Halo*'s development predated Xbox Live, the team at Bungie had limited opportunities to ensure *Halo*'s multiplayer could make the impact that they wanted. The result was to use the Xbox's System Link. Through this feature, consoles could be tied together with a set of Ethernet cables to link up to four machines together to allow for a massive 16-person LAN party. And that's precisely what happened.

» [PC] Creeping up behind someone with a sniper rifle feels like overkill, but we'll allow it.

> "HALO WAS MULTIPLAYER FROM THE VERY START"
> STEFAN SINCLAIR

"*Halo* had been developed for internet multiplayer even in its most primordial forms," explains Stefan, adding that, "when it became apparent that the Xbox Live service was not going to be ready in time for the Xbox launch, it just meant that we had to focus on making the split-screen and LAN (aka System Link) multiplayer experience as solid as possible." As a result Bungie was forced, in some manner, to focus solely on LAN/split-screen multiplayer, rather than as an additive function. "This paid big dividends in terms of the user interface and user experience for getting multiple players on multiple Xboxes connected as smoothly as possible," Stefan continues. "I think we did a great job making the experience as intuitive and seamless as possible. The proliferation of LAN parties speaks to that."

While *GoldenEye* had built up a following of players karate-chopping their way around Facility, *Halo* amped this up considerably. A potential maximum of 16 players across brilliantly designed maps (with the addition of vehicles, no less) was a tantalising prospect, and so a culture of *Halo* LAN parties really did begin to form around the popular shooter. University halls or college dorm rooms, large gatherings of friends or even commercially organised events flew in the face of the online gaming trend, and through that players were brought even closer together. "Not long after the launch of the game, a big community of *Halo*

BECOME A HALO

JUDGE THE DISTANCE

■ Every weapon has the perfect distance at which it is used and in most cases that should be pretty obvious, but learn to adapt to the situation and the map. Blasting your assault rifle at too far a distance is just going to give you away and nothing else.

YOUR PISTOL ISN'T A SIDEARM

■ It might not always be your weapon of choice in single-player, but in multiplayer a pistol in the hands of a nifty player is going to be a very serious threat. Its benefit is that it can suit almost any situation, so it's best to learn how to use it properly.

STRAFE TO SURVIVE

■ You've probably been raised on a diet of strafe-focused FPS games, but it should never go without saying: strafing around your targets (and doing the ol' double side step) will make you harder to hit and let you focus on dealing damage.

BACKPACK RELOADING

■ This neat trick will give you an advantage. Instead of waiting for your weapon to reload, you can double-tap reload, switch out to your alternate weapon and then carry on firing with that. When swapping back, your previous weapon will be reloaded.

MOVE AS A TEAM

■ We're not saying you need to perfect pro runs of each map in flawless synergy, but staying close to as many of your team-mates as possible is just going to increase your odds of surviving any encounter thanks to the old adage 'strength in numbers'.

» [PC] Camping is a dirty job but someone has to do it.

players sprung up around Microsoft in Redmond," recalls Stefan of the phenomenon of *Halo* LAN parties. "One group of them, led by Reed Townsend, would host regular *Halo* LAN parties in Microsoft's Building 116. Several of us from Bungie would participate in those, and they were great times. It was very gratifying to play alongside fans of the multiplayer game that we had worked on and see people enjoying it as much as we did."

Through this, *Halo*'s fans grew to become obsessed with its unique approach to multiplayer, which pairs Spartan warriors with high-tech weaponry, vehicles and the now-iconic 'teabagging' taunt – a 'treat' that Stefan claims he was the first to receive. *Halo*'s impressive multiplayer also left a big impression on *Edge*'s Alex Spencer. "For me personally, it was huge," he tells us. "And not just because I was able to reliably whitewash friends and neighbours in Battle Creek (although that certainly helped) but because, with the vehicles and weapons and maps, it was just incredibly rich. I have to shout out Hang 'Em High and Blood Gulch in particular, which are all-time multiplayer map designs. Of course, it was held back a little by the fact that you could only play locally – getting the full 16 players together required four Xboxes and an unholy amount of Ethernet cabling – but that just left something for the sequel to do."

FPS multiplayer might have changed tact somewhat over the years since, but there's no denying that *Halo* proved to the world that FPS multiplayer on a console couldn't just be improved upon, it could become a monstrously huge hit.

» [PC] Use different weapons to make the most of any given situation.

» [PC] Taking someone out with a rocket launcher remains immensely satisfying.

MASTER

FRAG YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS WITH THESE HANDY TIPS

PRACTICE WITH GRENADES

■ Knowing where to throw your grenades will come with time, but the first thing you should know is how they bounce. Start a game solo and spend some time seeing how they land, it'll help in the long term. And watch out for grenades thrown at you.

TIMING IS KEY

■ Much like *Quake*, all the special pickups available in *Halo* work on timers, so you'll want to try to keep track of when those things were taken and be prepared to cycle back around to their location when they're about ready to reappear.

CHECK YOUR RADAR

■ It should be instinctive if you've ever heard the phrase "UAV ready", but in *Halo* you're gonna wanna always keep one eye on the red dots on the radar and take action accordingly. You don't want to get surrounded by a load of opponents.

OBJECTIVES MATTER

■ You might be tempted to sit in a corner and snipe all day, but if you're not helping to run or defend the flag on CTF, play the objective or have an awful kill-to-death ration in Slayer then frankly you're not helping as much as you might think.

TEABAGGING

■ *Halo* is infamous for its lurid use of the crouch button upon a defeated player's lifeless skull (helmet?). If you've built yourself something of a rivalry with a player during a match or session, don't waste the opportunity to torment them the classic way.

AUGMENTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

MOST WILL AGREE THAT THE RICH, SCI-FI WORLD OF HALO IS ONE OF THE KEY FACTORS THAT MADE IT STANDOUT AND SURVIVE THE TEST OF TIME, BUT IT WAS BUNGIE'S APPROACH TO THE GAME'S AI THAT ULTIMATELY LED TO IT HAVING A TRULY BELIEVABLE WORLD...

It's not the sexiest topic to bring up whenever lavishing praise on a game, but there's something about being a retro-gaming fan that makes AI – and how its use in videogames has grown and evolved over the years – a truly compelling concept. And while *Halo* wasn't populating entire worlds with its artificial intelligence or simulating an oak tree growing from an acorn throughout the course of the game, the practical uses that were implemented not only added believability to *Halo*'s world, but a greater depth of strategy, too. This AI was enhanced by unique animations that let enemies fake dodges to make you miss them, roll away from your grenades or use specific abilities to evade a melee attack and follow up with a counter of their own. It all combined to create a truly intelligent set of enemies. The AI was *smart*, and that made *Halo*'s higher difficulties tough to beat.

The AI varied itself depending on situations, too, with the most obvious example being the Grunts, the weakest Covenant forces you'll find in the game. Catch one of these little fellas out on his lonesome and it'll waddle away in fear, arms a-flailing. Stumble upon a small group, however, and they'll collaborate, finding ways to expose you or force you to take action. Should you find an Elite among them, however, then you'll find this stronger unit almost acting like a leader of sorts, which gave the combat against the Covenant a genuine feeling of one man against an army. But of course you weren't one man, and the AI was also working among the human Marines, too, and both sides of the army were always looking to solve problems on the battlefield in their own personally driven ways. Even the Flood would hide around corners and wait for opportune moments to strike while you're preoccupied. It's what made the skirmishes feel so realistic, especially when humans faced off against the Covenant since the Chief really could sit back and watch the events unfold as each individual unit would make a decision based on achieving its own victory. You might not 'see' artificial intelligence in shooters, but you can certainly feel it *Halo*.

And in fact, players *did* feel it. When moving to *Halo 3*, Bungie switched away from the dynamic AI of *Halo 1* and *2* and instead went for deterministic AI processing, something that every *Halo* game since has followed with. What this means is that the enemy AI takes its actions based on the input from the player, meaning if you always do X then the AI will always do Y. It's less flashy than something like *Halo: Combat Evolved*'s dynamic AI, but it's easier to develop and arguably there's less 'value' in smart opponents than there is in sparing the processing power needed to operate them to instead crank up the visuals. Which is what happened with *Halo 3*, and players noticed: you'll still see people asking why the modern *Halo*s don't feel as impressive when it comes to the enemy AI.

The sad truth of it is that of all the ways that *Halo: Combat Evolved* has gone on to impact the shooter genre, its impressive artificial intelligence was the only thing that flew under the radar and was not given the attention it deserved. Over the years, impressive AI became a hard marketing concept and as a result very few shooters since have bothered to implement the same sort of depth to its AI, which is a shame considering the advances that have been made in the areas of processing power, game design and even artificial intelligence itself. At least when the genre is ready for some truly memorable battles again, *Halo: Combat Evolved* will still be there to inspire.

» [PC] Meeting the Flood is a turning point in the game's combat. They're not as strategic as the Covenant, but are no less terrifying to fight against.

ROGUE'S GALLERY

THE CRITTERS AND COMBATANTS MASTER CHIEF FACES

UNGGOY

■ Named Grunts by humans, the Unggoy are your everyday cannon fodder: fairly ineffective combatants, not especially hardy but a good distraction in larger numbers. These are arguably the most iconic enemy in the *Halo*-verse thanks to their cowardly nature; they'll try to flee when outnumbered, wailing and flailing as they do.

SANGHEILI

■ The core foundation of the Covenant army, the Elites as they are known, come in a broad spectrum of combat styles. Some have energy shields, some can be invisible, and some – the most intimidating of all – can decimate you with their neon energy swords. Watch out for those ones.

KIG-YAR

■ The Jackals are pretty one-note when it comes to their combat style, since each of these warriors come with a large, round shield that is impervious to United Nations Space Command bullets and regular energy pistol blasts. They're not too tough, but they can be tricky to take down without a proper strategy.

MGALEKGOLO

■ These Hunters are the most fearsome units of the Covenant army throughout *Halo: Combat Evolved* since their Fuel Rod Gun is capable of doling out the damage while their heavy armour makes them a beast to bring down. They'll typically appear in pairs, too, doubling the anguish they can cause.

» [PC] Your Warthog is overturned so it's best to take down this opponent the old-fashioned way.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

WHAT MAKES A SPARTAN SO FORMIDABLE?

HEADS-UP DISPLAY
Alongside the Chief's superhuman vision, the Spartan suit can also provide crucial status info and objectives.

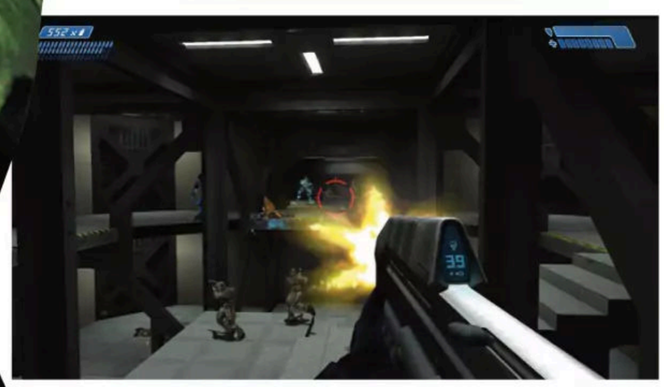
ENERGY SHIELD
This keeps the Spartan protected from incoming gunfire, and automatically recharges after depletion.

WEAPONS TRAINING
You'll need to find armaments in the field, so you better know how to use them.

SUPER STRENGTH
How else could you explain the ease with which Master Chief can flip a Warthog?

BOOSTED JUMP
The enhanced jump of the Spartan suit is capable of heights that would put LeBron James to shame.

REINFORCED BONES
It's what helps them survive high falls without breaking their legs.



» [PC] *Halo*'s gunfights always feel exciting, particularly when you play on the higher difficulty levels.

THE FLOOD (INFECTION FORM)

■ The ultimate aim of the Flood is to find new hosts through which they can leverage its abilities, and that's what these little buggers are about. They're pretty weak, popping with the slightest amount of pressure from your assault rifle – but that can cause a chain reaction of mini explosions.

THE FLOOD (COMBAT FORM)

■ Once a suitable host has been found, the Flood will reanimate its body and use it as its main form of offence. These are typically melee-focused combatants and not to be trifled with, since they'll take a lot of damage before their biomass becomes useless. The strength of a Combat Form is dictated by its host.

THE FLOOD (CARRIER FORM)

■ More passive than the other Flood forms, the Carrier Form is designed to give a space for Infection Forms to gestate. They'll explode if destroyed or within close range, which not only causes its internal critters to burst into action looking for a new host but can even create a chain reaction of explosions with other nearby Carriers.

DESIGNING HALO

IN MANY WAYS CONSIDERED TO BE GAMING'S STAR WARS, THE HALO FRANCHISE HAS GONE ON TO BUILD A WHOLE UNIVERSE'S WORTH OF LORE COVERING THE FORERUNNERS, THE FLOOD AND, OF COURSE, MASTER CHIEF'S IMPACT ON EVERYTHING. BUT IT ALL BEGAN IN 2552 CE. . .

Looking over these screenshots it might strike you that there's nothing particularly standout about *Halo*'s visual direction. In hindsight and with years of advancements in 3D design, we've become somewhat jaded to the storytelling of an environment. The environment of Installation 04 looks much like the pine-strewn environment of the Pacific Northwest from where *Halo* was developed, and perhaps that's intentional. But it's still an alien setting, and somehow while playing, it *feels* alien too. "Most of that comes from the Halo ring," says Steve Abeyta, one of the many artists that worked on *Halo: Combat Evolved* whose work primarily covered animation and environment design. "When you're outside in the game, wherever you are you can see the ringworld and that adds an alien feel to the game." The whole purpose was to create something that felt open and exciting, something that the player could feel was just waiting to be explored. That was where the Pacific Northwest influences came from, with Marcus Lehto – the game's art director – once telling **Retro Gamer** that the intent was to put players "into what is equivalent to a giant national park and allowing the player to free roam and explore this giant natural wonderland that was the terrains of *Halo*".

And while the UNSC were always designed to be something familiar to our own modern-day worlds, only extrapolated 100 years into the future, the alien races of the Covenant, the Flood or the ancient and extinct Forerunners each had their own design philosophies that were each subtle yet unique. The Covenant was more overtly 'alien', with its sci-fi spaceships and plasma blasting rifles. The Forerunners were more mechanical, most noticeable in the likes of Guilty Spark 343 but also in the buildings of the Halo ring itself and the various unexplained symbols and sigils that decorated its interiors. Then there is the Flood, hideous fungal-like creatures that were at odds with the clean, hard edges of the sci-fi world – visually representing the threat that they presented to the order and exactness of all of the universe's civilised races.

» [PC] Seeing the Halo ring in the distance is a constant reminder you're fighting on an alien world.

» [Xbox] Later stages of *Halo* see Master Chief constantly caught up in skirmishes between other enemy factions.

> "MASTER CHIEF NEVER STRUCK ME AS A VISUALLY ICONIC CHARACTER"
> STEVE ABEYTA

Then there's the Master Chief, whose enigmatic and arguably unexciting appearance has gone on to become one of videogames' most iconic characters. "Master Chief never struck me as a visually iconic character," admits Steve, "but I always thought the design was elegant and memorable and sophisticated, there's nothing cheesy about his design." Steve adds that Master Chief is almost an extension of the UNSC's design aesthetic, that John-117 is as much a weapon as those he uses. "There's the Warthog, right? Which looks like this really well-designed, industrial piece of equipment, and Master Chief seems like he's in the same family. Like, in the *Halo* world, the same company designed and manufactured this Jeep *and* this suit, so it's more about form follows function – he looks [more] like a piece of equipment than a bespoke character."

Game worlds were already becoming more detailed and intricate, particularly on PC, with the likes of *Deus Ex* and *Half-Life* proving that rich and detailed worlds to explore could add a much greater fidelity and immersion to the game. But *Halo*'s approach to its visual design encapsulated a sense of world building that out-scaled anything that came before it. There was subtlety to everything, and not just in the various details and design decisions, but also in the way the tech was pushed to new areas. Steve talks of how *Halo*'s project lead had once been set a challenge to come up with something cool, and through that, "Jason just sat there over the weekend and we came in on Monday and he was like, 'Hey, check this out, physics-flag!' which was mind-blowing at the time because you hadn't seen that. And that made it into the game." Team members would just come up with ideas or be given the opportunity to create some and just go to town on it, putting in the hours to add something new and exciting – however small it may be – to add just a little more detail to the world of *Halo*. "There are dozens of these things that just got put in because people were so passionate about the game," says Steve. "And so when you add them all up, that's why there's so much detail and love that went into the game."

» [PC] That's going to be dropping off the Covenant. Take them out before they have a chance to regroup.

» [PC] The Warthog is great fun, whether you're behind the wheel or manning its gun.

THE WEAPONS OF HALO

TURN THE TIDE WITH THIS DEADLY ARSENAL

M6D PISTOL

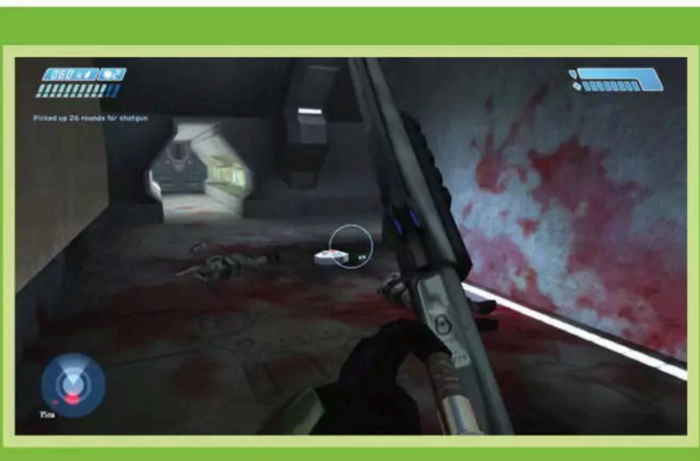
■ Chances are high you rarely used this sidearm beyond the initial moments aboard the Pillar Of Autumn. It's not that the classic pistol is a bad weapon, it's just not going to replace anything else that you'll easily find lying around.

MA5B ASSAULT RIFLE

■ Basically the bread-and-butter weaponry for Master Chief and the UNSC Marines. It'll be your go-to weapon for the majority of *Halo*, though it is best used as a close-range weapon due to its weaker per-bullet damage and wide spread.

TYPE-25 PLASMA PISTOL

■ This is the earliest Covenant weapon you'll find. It's particularly handy to have as a secondary weapon since an overcharged plasma pistol will knock out any Covenant shield, at which point a blast from the assault rifle will finish the job.



M90 ASSAULT SHOTGUN

■ What's an FPS without a handy shotgun? As you might expect, it's a heavy-damage, close-range weapon that can down almost any foe if you're close enough for the full spread to land. You'll first find this when you also find the Flood.

TYPE-25 PLASMA RIFLE

■ The Covenant's equivalent to the UNSC's automatic weapons, this mid-range rifle might not have as much utility as the plasma pistol but it still packs a punch and can even slightly stun enemies in place. Just watch out for it overheating, which can happen very quickly.

TYPE-33 NEEDLER

■ Arguably the most iconic gun of the series, the Needler's unique ammunition will home in on a target and, after a short delay, will explode after embedding into its target. Attach seven or more needles into your target at once to produce a larger explosion, killing most enemies.

SRS99C-S2 AM SNIPER RIFLE

■ As the most powerful weapon in the game, at least in terms of damage, a skilled marksman will likely find that the sniper rifle will help in most gunfights, at least before they get flanked by the enemy AI. The only issue is the Flood, where the bullet simply flies through their body.

M41 SPNKR

■ What better way to down those pesky Covenant Wraiths or Hunters than with rocket-propelled explosives? As you might expect, ammunition for this is limited so you'll need to pick your targets wisely, but it's a lot of fun all the same – especially in multiplayer.

FUEL ROD GUN

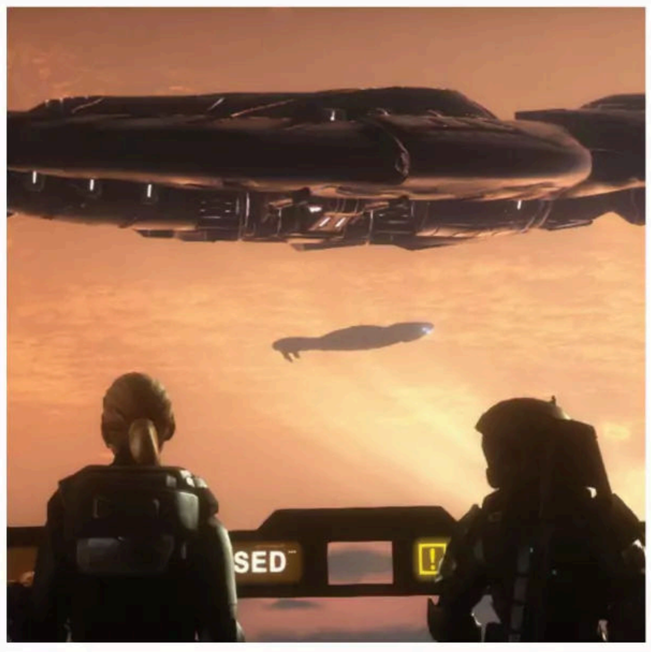
■ While this devastating gadget could only be used in multiplayer in the PC/Mac version of *Halo*, it's actually the weapon used by Hunters in the campaign. It fires an arcing ball of superheated fuel, which generates a massive explosion when it hits.

HALO'S LEGACY

PLAYSTATION FANS ARE STILL ON THE HUNT FOR THEIR 'HALO KILLER', WHICH GOES SOME WAY TO HIGHLIGHT JUST HOW IMPACTFUL THE FRANCHISE HAS BEEN. IT'S BEEN A CONSOLE SELLER FOR MICROSOFT FOR YEARS, BUT HAS BEEN LEVERAGED IN OTHER INTERESTING WAYS TOO. . .

HALO 2

Any sequel to a breakthrough hit (no less a brand-new console launch) is going to be tough, but Bungie was given the time and resources to make something special in 2004. The studio was able to learn about what worked with the original, and fine-tune that campaign into something more cinematic and blockbuster-like. However, it's arguably the addition of online multiplayer that stole the show here, bringing online FPS gaming to consoles and proving the need for an Xbox Live subscription.

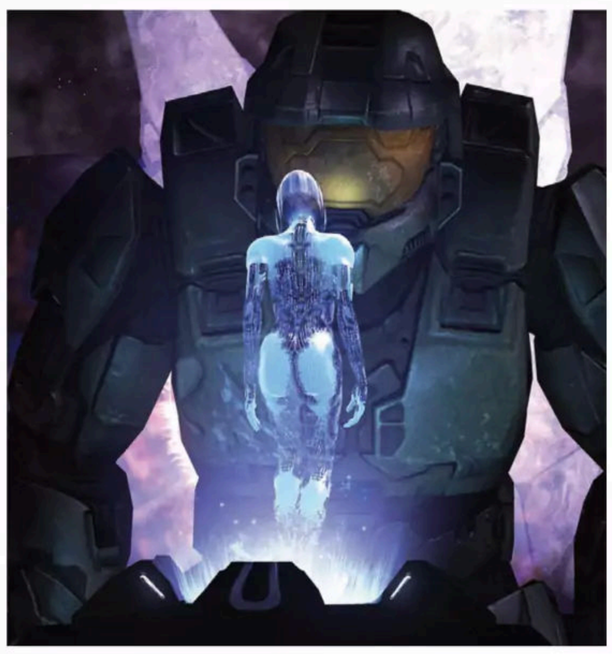


HALO 3: ODST

While it might not seem like it, this 2009 game was a huge departure for the series. For the first time ever, players were one of the soldiers on the ground instead of the enhanced Spartan warriors. Not only did the reduction in power change the shape of the combat, but it also resulted in a more personable and melancholic story, which tied in nicely to *Halo 3*'s tale while still keeping itself removed from the space opera going on with the earlier release.

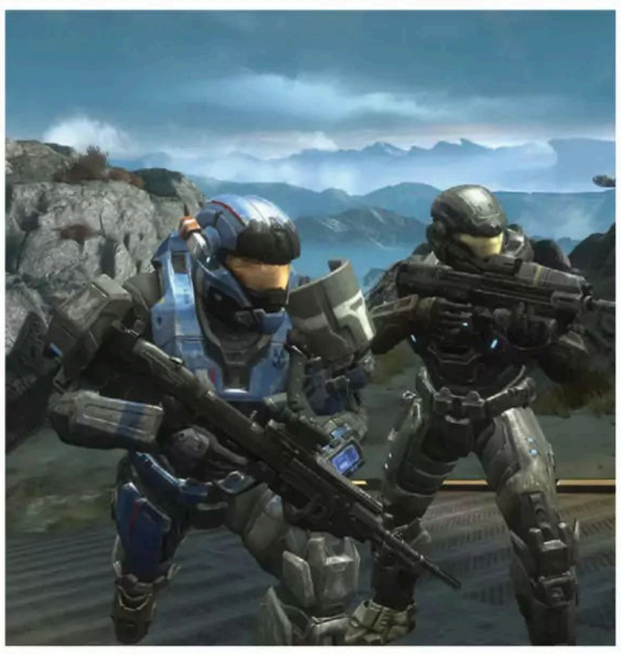
HALO 3

When it came time for *Halo* to make it over to a new generation, the hype was already beyond belief. Bungie was smart to retain everything that players loved about the *Halo* campaign, with the battle against two Scarabs being particularly memorable. But it was the multiplayer that stood out the most, especially with features like the Forge where it was possible to create your own multiplayer maps. This 2007 release defined the Xbox 360 generation, and remains fondly remembered for that reason.



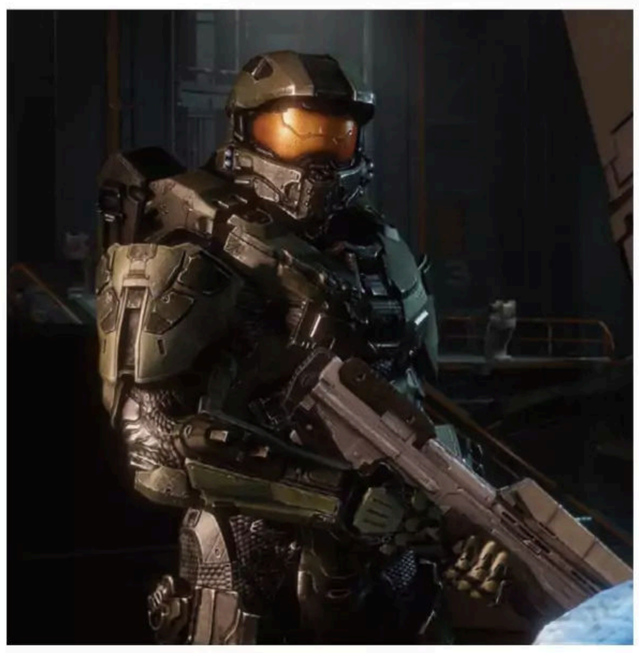
HALO: REACH

The series had already said a lot about the fall of Reach at this point, the battle that lost humanity's most important galactic outpost. As a result, this 2010 release was a prequel. And an important one at that, since it was Bungie's last *Halo* game, one that proved the years of *Halo* experience. It was the pinnacle of Bungie's work, while still having the courage to play around with conventions already expected of the franchise. It was Bungie's swan song, and a beloved one at that.



HALO WARS

However unexpected *Halo Wars* was, it was an admirable attempt to do something different with the franchise in 2009. It was designed to bring real-time strategy over to consoles in a very real way and managed that surprisingly well. Trouble is, it wasn't much more than a distraction for *Halo* fans, and failed to make itself essential.

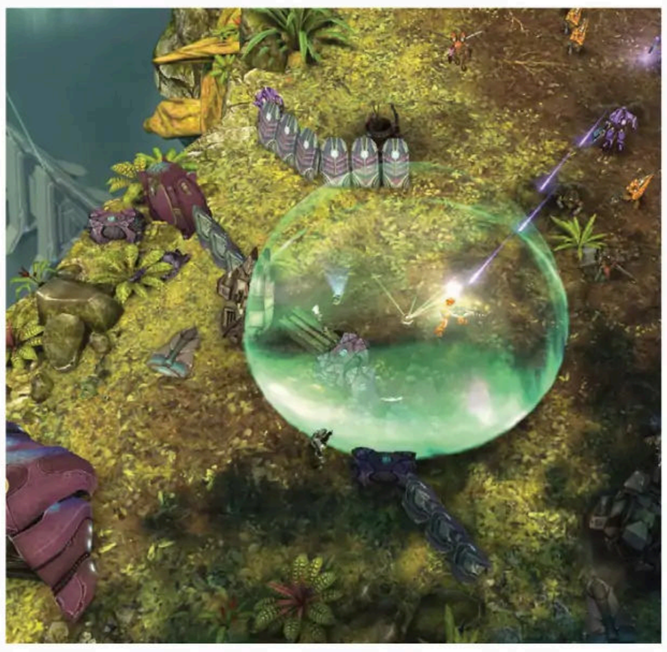


HALO 4

And so at this point a new challenger steps in, with 343 Industries (so named after *Halo*'s own 343 Guilty Spark) having the impossible task of following in Bungie's footsteps. This 2012 game has been perhaps the most divisive in the series, but there's no denying that *Halo 4* retained a lot of what made the franchise so beloved, and built on the rich *Halo*-verse. If nothing else, 343 proved its capabilities and for most *Halo* fans that would be enough.

HALO: SPARTAN ASSAULT

■ While *Halo Wars* could be considered a misstep, it at least held some value for hardcore *Halo* fans. While this 2013 twin-stick shooter did replicate the feel of *Halo* well enough, it was in a confused manner that mostly left a bitter taste in the mouth of fans.



HALO: SPARTAN STRIKE

■ While things were improved for *Spartan Assault*'s 2015 follow-up, its continued focus on twin-stick shooting held it back from maintaining the same sense of scale, strategy and skill that the series was known for. If any of the *Halo* games were to be overlooked, it's this pair. Like *Spartan Assault*, *Spartan Strike* was designed by 343 Industries ad Vanguard Games.

HALO RECRUIT

■ It would be a stretch to call this 2017 release a game. Exclusive to VR, this is a short five-minute scene where a new unnamed recruit has a chat with 343 Guilty Spark, takes part in a gallery target shoot-out and then catches a glimpse of Master Chief climbing into a Warthog. That's really all there is to it.

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

■ Released in 2015 on Xbox One, this was 343 Industries' chance to really show the world what it could do with the *Halo* franchise. It was a little more disappointing than *Halo 4* as 343 took some bold steps in its approach, but it was the story that most players were maddened by. The questionable decision to step away partially from Master Chief was not handled well, while Cortana being made the baddie also annoyed many fans.

HALO: FIRETEAM RAVEN

■ This co-operative 2018 game is yet another unusual use of the *Halo* franchise. *Fireteam Raven* brings *Halo* into the arcades with lightgun combat the likes of which most of us have played at least once in our lives. Naturally, it's a world away from typical *Halo* games, but it has undoubtedly attracted a few *Halo* diehards over the last couple of years.

HALO WARS 2

■ No one expected the first *Halo Wars* and, equally, no one expected the 2017 sequel. The same praise could be given to the RTS successor, but this time around there was a bigger focus on storytelling, cinematics and accessibility (not all *Halo* fans want to endure the complexities of the real-time strategy genre).

HALO INFINITE

■ We need to be a little careful here since, at the time of writing, *Halo Infinite* isn't yet released and will do so in only a matter of weeks. There's been much praise for the multiplayer outing so far, which has recently held a beta test, but there's still a lot of questions about whether or not 343 Industries really has what it takes to retain the essence of the innovative, special shooter that Bungie released exactly 20 years ago.

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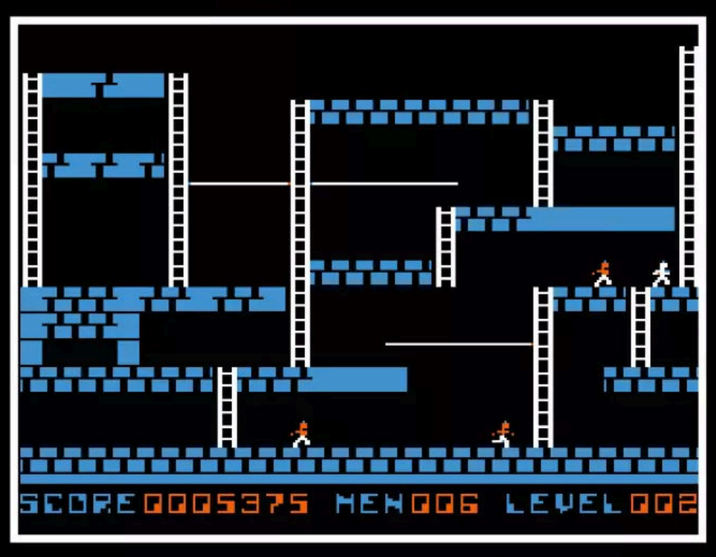
THE EVOLUTION OF

Lode Ru

In the decades after Broderbund published Doug Smith's platformer Lode Runner countless sequels followed. Broderbund's Doug Carlston and a whole cast of developers and producers who worked on the series explain its ongoing popularity

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

» [Apple II] Before it was called *Lode Runner*, Doug Smith called his challenging Apple II platformer *Miner*.



» [Apple II] Once you complete a *Lode Runner* stage a ladder appears that you use to reach the next level.

In the early Eighties, when Broderbund Software cofounder Doug Carlston first set eyes on the game that would ultimately become *Lode Runner*, Doug Smith's project had gone through several iterations and lost its co-developer James Bratsanos. Carlston's initial instinct was to reject it, until some important alterations were made. "It was written on a VAX, so it was a very low-resolution game, and the Apple II version was just a straight translation," Carlston reflects. "I think the characters in the game were just three pixels, so you couldn't tell what was going on. So I told Doug Smith that he didn't need the mazes to be that big; he could make mazes that were smaller and more interesting. He needed to change the scale to make it work, and he also had to change the levels."

After receiving a revised version of Smith's work, Broderbund asked the developer to give his platform game 150 levels, at a time when popular platformers such as *Donkey Kong* just had four. "We didn't think of arcade games as competition, except for ideas," Carlston clarifies. "The number of levels was a function of what we had available in terms of what was ready to publish. There was no cost to putting more in, and certainly each level took very little space in terms of storage, so that wasn't an issue. We assumed that we just had to give players enough that it was a good game, and if we had more then there was no reason not to put more in."

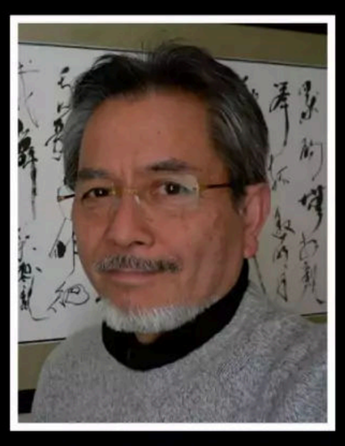
As well as 150 levels, Smith also submitted the editor that had been used to make them, and as it wasn't seen as a threat to potential sequels it was bundled with the game. "We had a pretty good understanding of how hard it was to make a good level," Carlston reasons, "and so we figured people would find it intriguing to design their own but would find that a lot harder than playing them. The people who wrote games had the patience and were willing to sit there working out all of the details, and a lot of game players just wanted to get to the next thing. So I don't think it ever occurred to us that the level editor would be competition."

A subset of players turned out to be natural level designers, however, and so Broderbund released its most challenging stages as *Championship Lode Runner*. "We encouraged people to make their own levels and submit them to us," Carlston notes. "It was relatively low-cost, and people were pleased to see their levels in there. But they were very, very hard and I wasn't quite sure that was a good idea, because you could over-frustrate people. I used to play all of our games to make sure they were playable, and I remember thinking *Championship Lode Runner* was right on the edge."

Given that *Championship Lode Runner* was designed using *Lode Runner*'s editor, there was

DOUG CARLSTON

» Broderbund founder Doug Carlston published the original *Lode Runner* and its sequel *Championship Lode Runner*.

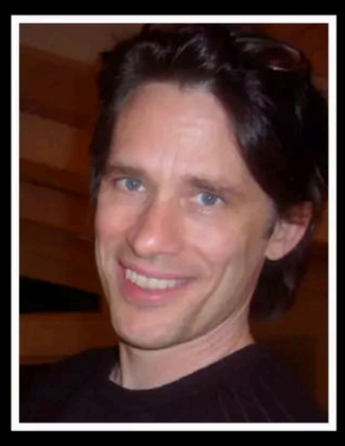


SCOTT TSUMURA

» Tozai Games founder Scott Tsumura has been involved with the *Lode Runner* series since the mid-Eighties.

BETH DAGGERT

» Beth Daggert coded and co-designed *Lode Runner: The Legend Returns* and *Lode Runner Online*.

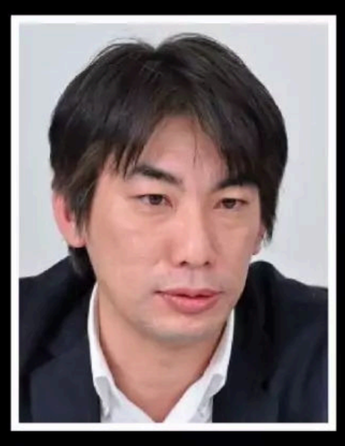


SCOTT MATHEWS

» While at Presage Software, Scott Mathews produced and co-designed the isometric title *Lode Runner 2*.

BRETT BALLOW

» Brett Ballow has designer credits on *Lode Runner 3D* and XBLA *Lode Runner*.



TAKUYA BANNO

» President of Tozai Games Japan, Takuya Banno, was the producer on *Lode Runner: Legacy*.

Lode Runner

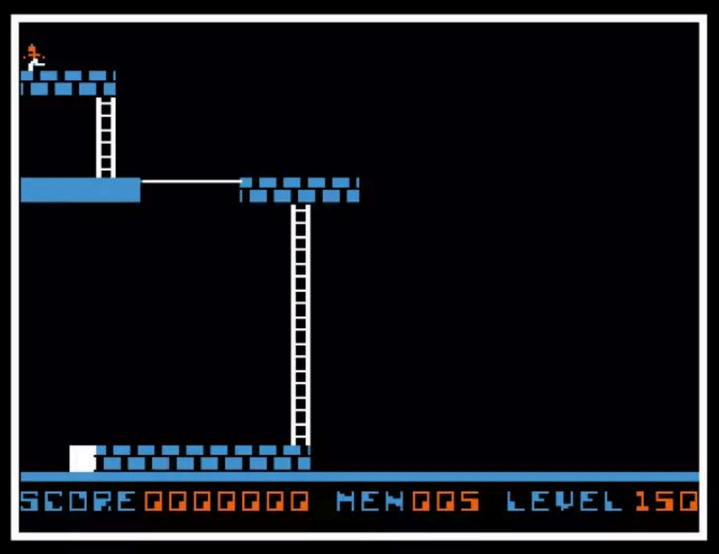
no way of adding new mechanics, which was down to a coding hiatus taken by Doug Smith. "I don't think he did any more coding for it; I don't think he wanted to do that anymore," Carlston points out. "So with *Championship Lode Runner* we had the same code base, and all we added were new levels. He may have designed some of them, I can't remember, but if he did then that would have been the extent of the development he did for us after *Lode Runner*."

But as Smith took a break from developing, he shifted to licensing *Lode Runner* titles for an eager Japanese market, as former Irem producer Scott Tsumura explains. "Japanese people like puzzles, and games where you use strategy," Scott considers. "Plus *Lode Runner* had action and was about reaction times, and those things added a very good balance. That's why it was an especially big hit in Japan. Our development team at Irem loved Apple – the Apple II and the Macintosh. Naturally we found *Lode Runner* on the Apple II, and we loved that, so we thought about how we could modify it to be an arcade game, but that was a real challenge."

The main issues with adapting *Lode Runner* for the arcades were the need for more colourful and interesting enemies, and finding more ways for players to rack up high scores. "Arcade games usually had graphics that were 256 x 256 pixels, but we had to make many types of enemies, and for that we needed a higher resolution," Tsumura recollects. "Fortunately our parent company made monitors, so it could create circuit boards that would give us a 384 x 256 pixel resolution. The different enemies we designed either chased you slowly or quickly, or had different attacks. We also added more ways to score points. So when you dug three holes, put enemies in them and ran over their heads then you'd get maybe 300 points."

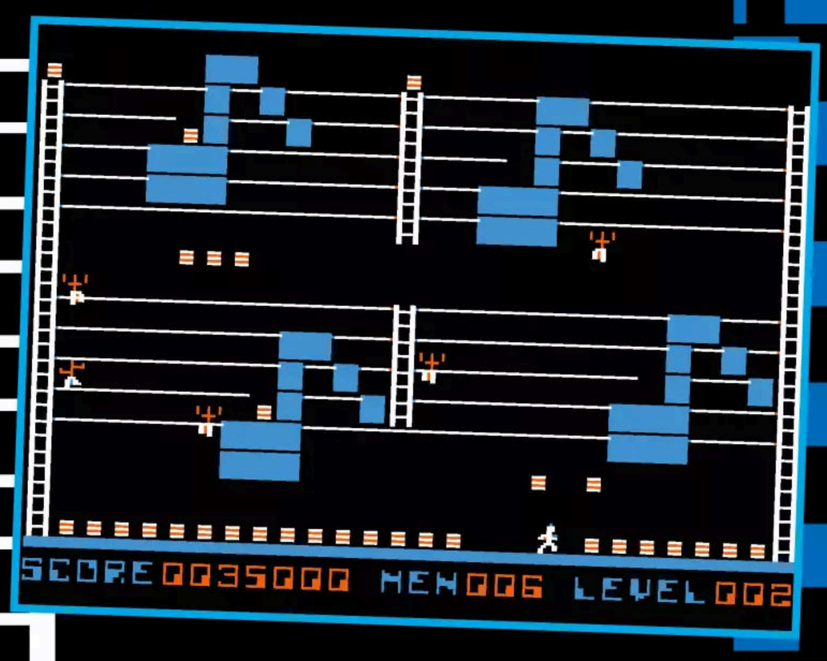
> "We encouraged people to make their own levels and submit them. It was relatively low-cost, and people were pleased to see their levels in there"
>
> DOUG CARLSTON

An additional challenge saw Irem having to produce its *Lode Runner* coin-op against the clock, in order to take advantage of a promising marketing ▶



» [Apple II] *Lode Runner*'s level editor is simple to use, but making interesting designs with it requires practice.

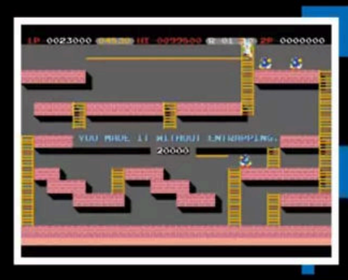
» [Apple II] From its first stage onwards, *Championship Lode Runner* is far more challenging than the original.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION: COIN-OP CAPERS

WE LOOK AT THE JAPANESE LODE RUNNER ARCADE GAMES

LODE RUNNER TRILOGY



Irem's *Lode Runner*, *The Bungeling Strikes Back* and *The Golden Labyrinth* share the same codebase, but each has unique level designs. The trilogy has you tackling its stages against the clock, and rewards you for falling on enemies and walking over their heads when they're in holes.

LODE RUNNER: TEIKOKU KARANO DASSHUTSU

For its fourth *Lode Runner* coin-op, Irem added a Pair Game mode, which is similar to its trilogy but with two players clearing stages together. Interestingly, if one player dies in the co-op mode then both lose a life, and to reach some gold you have to stand on your co-player.

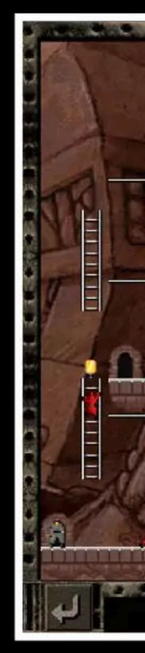
LODE RUNNER: THE DIG FIGHT

As with its predecessors, there's a time limit to finish *Dig Fight*'s levels, but Psikyo's coin-op adds power-ups that put time on the clock. It also allows you to fill the holes that you dig, and has a two-player mode where you collect eggs and send monsters after your competitor.

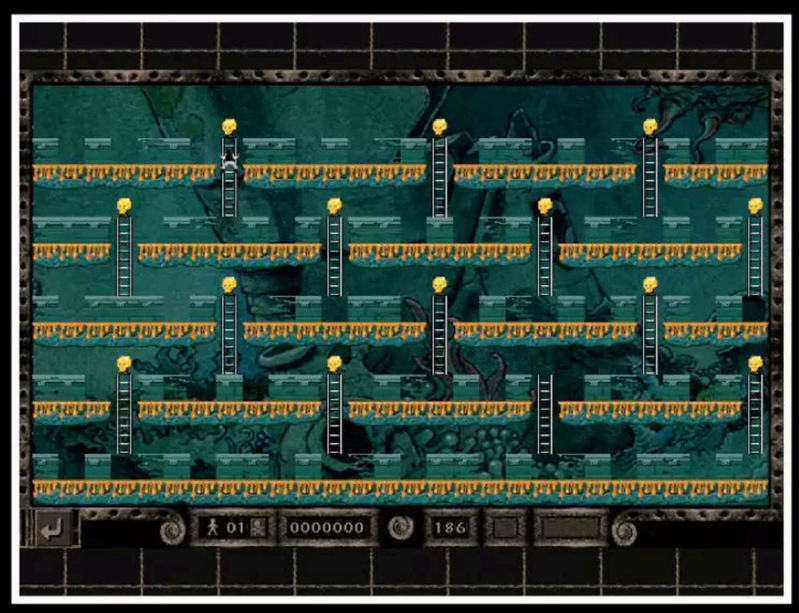
opportunity. "Usually the development of arcade games took a year," Tsumura observes, "but Irem licensed the arcade *Lode Runner* just as Hudson Soft licensed the Famicom version, and we wanted to publish around the same time as Hudson, because it had much better marketing. This meant that we had to complete development in just seven months. That was *very* hard, but the arcade *Lode Runner* ultimately became a hit, and we went on to make a series of four games."

Several other Japanese developers released computer and console sequels throughout the Eighties, then in 1994 US firm Presage released *Lode Runner: The Legend Returns*, as its coder/designer Beth Daggert recalls. "It was an exciting chance to revisit *Lode Runner* with what was at the time a big step up in technology," Beth points out. "We had the luxury to introduce mechanics to create more complicated puzzles, and with that in mind we expanded the palette of options that we had as designers. We very much viewed the task as one where we walked people through the game, because these were new mechanics. So with each new world we defined puzzles where you really had to use that world's particular mechanic."

Fresh mechanics such as time-bombs, locked exits and keys, and alcoves to hide from enemies made *Legend Returns* a popular release, and so an online version with new worlds was commissioned. "The major impetus was to have a network version of *Legend Returns*, so the bulk of the development went into enabling that," Beth remembers. "But there was still time left over, so we brought back some of the things that were on the cutting-room floor. *Legend Returns* had been absolutely rushed, but with *Lode Runner Online* we actually got



» [PC] *Lode Runner: The Legend Returns* adds various new ideas to the series, such as locked exits and also appeared on Mac, PlayStation and Saturn.



» [PC] Although it's basically an online version of *The legend Returns, Lode Runner Online* introduces fresh mechanics.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

COMPUTER CAPERS

REVISITING THE JAPANESE LODE RUNNER COMPUTER GAMES

LODE RUNNER II

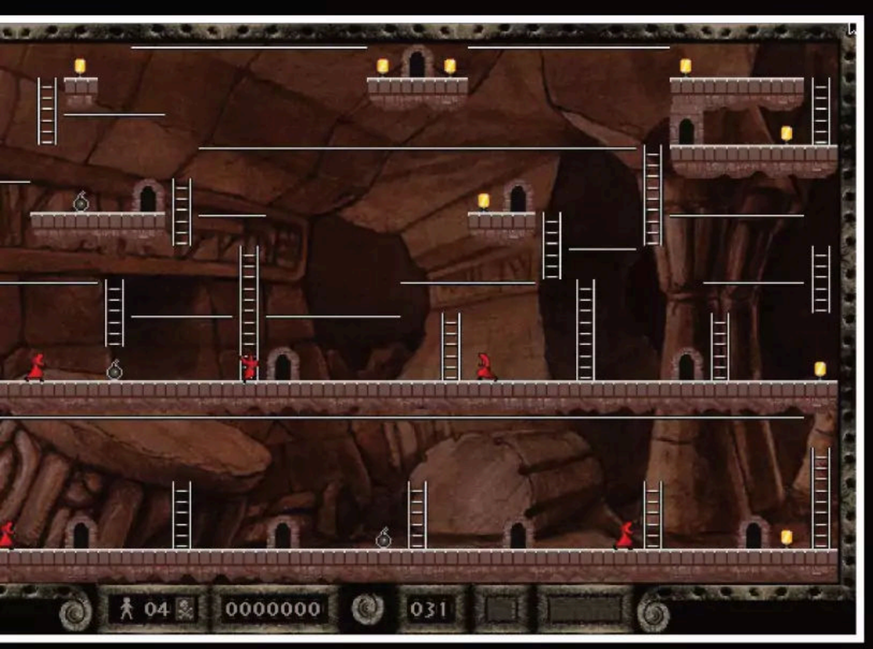
Compile's exclusive MSX follow-up retains the original's mechanics, but its 50 new levels each have a unique feel. You'll get a stage that's practically all ladders, for example, or one that has very few surfaces that can be dug into, and as a result the game keeps you on your toes.

HOZONBAN LODE RUNNER

As well as the levels from the original and its *Championship* sequel, *Hozonban Lode Runner* has 100 new stages. It also has optional colour schemes, and alternate hero and enemy sprites. Its new levels are tough, and they involve a bit of backtracking, but they're satisfying to beat.

LODE RUNNER 1

Besides its beautiful visuals, *Lode Runner 1* distinguishes itself further by adding to the gameplay established by its predecessors. Most obviously, it has various enemies with contrasting behaviours, but it also offers up new hazards and unlockable heroes with different skillsets.



"We had to complete development in just seven months. That was very hard, but the arcade Lode Runner ultimately became a hit"

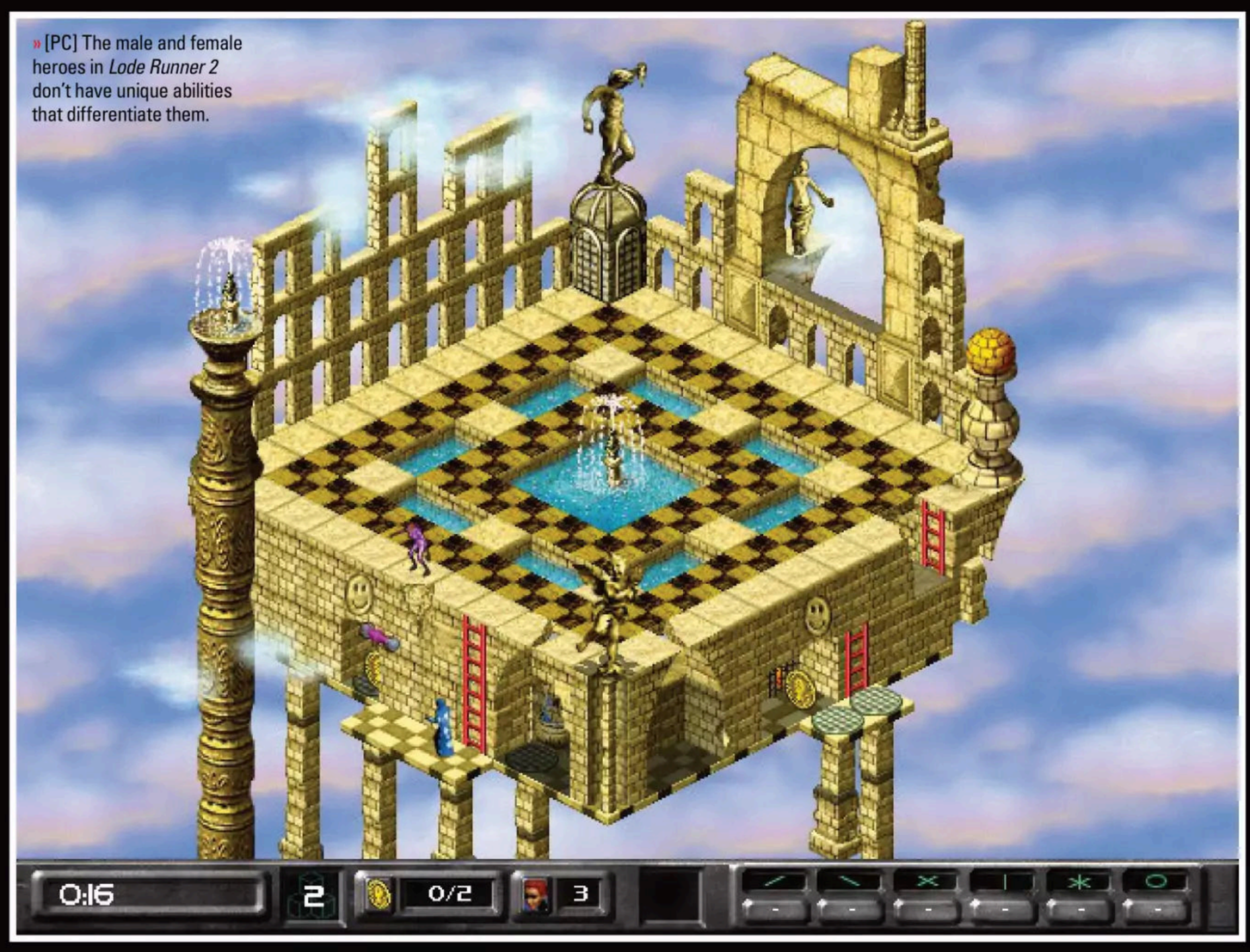
SCOTT TSUMURA

the time to do it right. That's just so rare, so I hold it dear just on that basis."

A third title using the *Legend Returns* engine followed two years later, although Presage didn't design the unforgiving Japan-only release *Lode Runner Extra*. "It would have been very easy for its developers to design puzzles that were difficult and frustrating," Beth contemplates, "and it would have taken a lot more effort to do stuff that was a challenge but not overly complicated. The 'obscuring' mechanic meant its designers could hide gold or extras behind bricks – so players had to dig around for them, and we built that in with some trepidation. If you relied on it heavily – like with *Extra* – then it was just no fun."

» [PC] The surreal level design in *Lode Runner 2* reaches its zenith with the game's 'Wacky World' stage.

Presage's subsequent project *Lode Runner 2* was developed in-house, where its isometric perspective shaped its design, as former Presage producer Scott Mathews reviews. "Digging down in isometric was a whole new, fun thing, and we wanted that to take centre stage," he enthuses. "So the Bunglers followed a looping path that was a bit simpler than that found in *Legend Returns*, and that took time to perfect. Other challenges were in defining where the player characters could jump down from. At first, they could jump off every place where there was an edge, but that broke the mechanics, so we tightened it up to corner jumping only."



» [PC] The male and female heroes in *Lode Runner 2* don't have unique abilities that differentiate them.

Presage's art team found a different kind of challenge with *Lode Runner 2*'s isometrics, insomuch as they set themselves the task of producing the most surreal level designs possible. "Presage had its roots in educational content – with titles like *Carmen Sandiego*, so *Lode Runner 2* was an opportunity to break out of that and flex our artistic muscles," Mathews says thinking back. "Our art director and all the environment artists involved really embodied the spirit of 'anything goes' and that was a joy to be a part of. We were developing something that we loved to look at and play ourselves. So if we took delight in it, then we figured others would too."

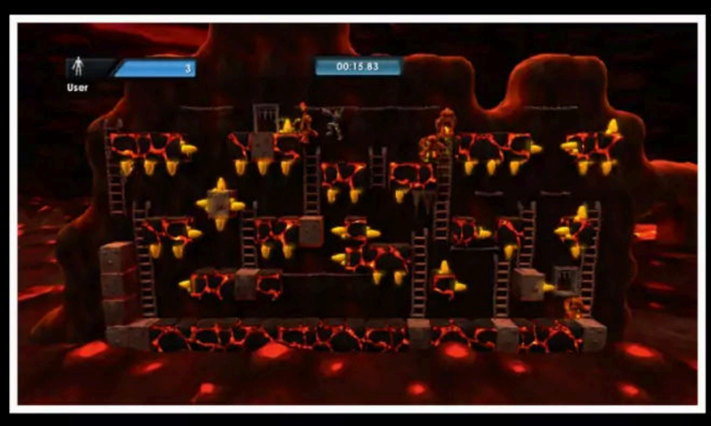
» [N64] Instead of climbing ladders in *Lode Runner 3D* you use elevators to reach high-up areas.

» [N64] The living platforms in *Lode Runner 3D* are one of its most visually impressive innovations.

"We emphasized that the new enemies would not only act strangely, but would also be closely related to the puzzles"

TAKUYA BANNO

» [Xbox 360] Like in the original game, you can blast blocks while climbing ladders in the XBLA *Lode Runner*.



» [Xbox 360] You can't escape the XBLA *Lode Runner*'s Hang-On mode stages; you just survive as long as possible.

▶ The new features in *Lode Runner 2* included the option of playing as a male or female character, although the two heroes had identical abilities rather than contrasting ones. "We had a strong culture of diversity and inclusion; certainly far beyond what I saw in other studios at that time," Mathews reflects. "It was a psychologically safe place to work, and I think the creation of the female character was a natural extension of that. As to why we didn't create different powers for each character, I think that would have stepped outside the bounds of the genre for us. We felt character distinction was more RPG-ish and not puzzle-ish."

The following year, Big Bang Software released *Lode Runner 3D* for the N64, produced by Scott Tsumura and co-designed by Brett Ballow, who felt aspects of the original game needed to be updated. "The futuristic feel of early 3D games influenced *Lode Runner 3D*'s design, and a highly automated, mechanical world was targeted," Brett comments. "So ropes and ladders were modernised into fixtures that slightly varied in function throughout the different worlds, and new block types were introduced with unique graphics and animations. Other nuances were also addressed, such as how the hero was able to safely fall from ledges many times his own height – ie rocket boosters were added to the soles of his boots!"

A decade later, Scott Tsumura's Tozai Games published a *Lode Runner* reboot for XBLA, with far less opponents than its Eighties' inspiration and Brett Ballow back on design duties. "The rendering capabilities of the Xbox 360 were so superior to the N64 that we revisited how best to upgrade the textures," Brett says of the follow-up. "Surprisingly, even after making several versions of each block type, and after several iterations of simplifying the textures, the original 16 x 28 grid levels looked very busy on high-definition TVs. So smaller levels were created, but they made distancing yourself from enemies that much more difficult, so fewer were needed to attain the frenetic pace of the original."

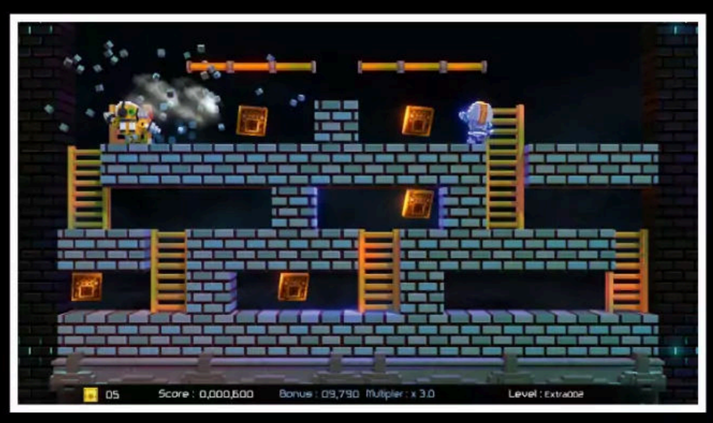
On the request of the XBLA platform team, various modes were designed for the service's *Lode Runner* title, including Hang On mode, where survival was key and escape was impossible. "We were tasked with making co-operative and competitive multiplayer modes, as well as a new mode

» [PC] They may look sparse, but *Lode Runner: Legacy*'s Puzzle mode levels are a serious challenge.

that allowed players to play for just two or three minutes at a time," Brett explains. "Hang On mode was our solution for a quick *Lode Runner* experience, and as it was just a bonus mode it felt OK to break some of the old *Lode Runner* rules – which turned out to be the case as it posted a very popular and constantly churning XBLA Leaderboard."

Building on the XBLA game's success, Tozai published the iOS/Android title *Lode Runner 1* and console/PC title *Lode Runner: Legacy*, which as its producer Takuya Banno notes had a Puzzle mode without enemies. "Many puzzle levels without enemies had been created by players over the years, and there had been *Lode Runner* games in the past that had modes dedicated to puzzle stages as well," Banno considers. "*Legacy*'s Puzzle mode focused on the 'puzzle' part of the 'action and puzzle' aspect of *Lode Runner*, and required you to think about how to dig holes in the right order and with the right timing so that you could not only get to the gold but also secure an escape route. It was similar to the fun that a chess problem poses."

Another of *Legacy*'s modes introduced slightly odd opponents with unique abilities, such as dogs that dug through bricks and living bombs that blew-up without warning. "*Lode Runner: Legacy* introduced new types of enemies with different algorithms, which were carefully selected from among many ideas," Banno reveals. "We emphasised that the new enemies would not only act strangely, but would also be closely related to the puzzles so that you would have to strategically use them to conquer some levels. As far as we know, these enemies were very well received by core *Lode Runner* fans, as they successfully added a new element of strategy to the *Lode Runner* series, and we



» [PC] The Extra mode stages in *Lode Runner: Legacy* feature new enemies such as block-busting dogs.

felt that we were able to present new possibilities with them." Tozai plans to continue the long-running *Lode Runner* series on the Intellivision Amico, and speaking to the firm's executive producer Scott Tsumura it's very clear that the IP is in good hands. "*Lode Runner* greatly strengthened my relationship with Broderbund Software and Doug Smith, and eventually we continued to work together," Tsumura says of the franchise's early days. "Then Doug Carlston, the president of Broderbund, invited me to come to the US to work, so *Lode Runner* changed my life. Now, as you know, Tozai owns the *Lode Runner* IP, so *Lode Runner* is kind of my life."

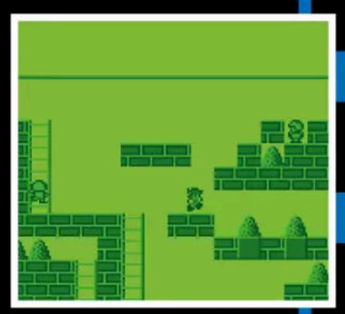
Reflecting on the late Doug Smith's original game, Broderbund founder Doug Carlston has bittersweet memories of the developer and a high regard for *Lode Runner*. "We published something like 1,700 products, and *Lode Runner* is certainly one I remember well," Carlston says with hindsight. "But I remember the relationships with the people I worked with more, and Doug was always a bit of an enigma. I've not played *Lode Runner* for quite a long time, but of course I look back at it with fondness – and I think its gameplay definitely holds up." *

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

CONSOLE CAPERS

YOUR GUIDE TO THE JAPANESE LODE RUNNER CONSOLE GAMES

HYPER LODE RUNNER

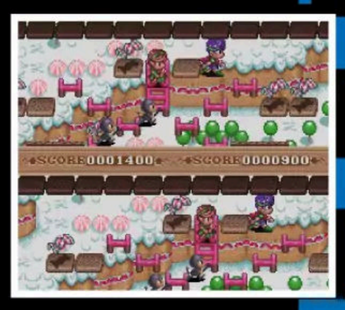


The Game Boy's tiny screen likely made scrolling levels the only option for *Hyper Lode Runner*, but it means you don't know where the gold is until you look for it. One nice feature is that some stages have keys and locked doors to subsections.

BATTLE LODE RUNNER

Battle Lode Runner's main draw are its multiplayer modes. Its three variations are: Escape – where you try to get gold from an enemy first, Survival – where you're out if you fall in a hole and Tag – where two teams of two play Survival.

LODE RUNNER TWIN: JUSTY TO LIBERTY NO DAIBOKEN



Aside from a cute and colourful solo mode, *Lode Runner Twin* has co-op and head-to-head options. Across the modes, there are some pretty big scrolling stages to find your way around, but handy on-screen miniature maps depict them in their entirety.

CUBIC LODE RUNNER

Although isometric, *Cubic Lode Runner* sticks to the original's gameplay, but it adds some curious features. You get medals for collecting fruit that appears if you kill enough foes, and there are unlockable TV ads for early *Lode Runner* games.

BMF
PAINT
BRUSH
SC.04420

The Flintstones

YABBA-DABBA-DON'T

RETROREVIVAL

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1991 » TIERTEX

Kids don't care as much about the age of things as adults do. Most of the *Looney Tunes* and *Tom & Jerry* cartoons I grew up with were older than both of my parents, but I'd watch them as happily as I'd watch something contemporary like *Garfield And Friends*. The same goes for *The Flintstones* – its staying power ensured that Grandslam Entertainment deemed it worthy of a Master System game. As a young owner of that console, my collection was heavy on licensed games like *The Lucky Dime Caper*, *Asterix* and *Taz-Mania*, and today I thank my lucky stars that *The Flintstones* never joined them.

For the most part, *The Flintstones* is an incredibly easy game, and one which makes sense. Of course Fred would want to drive to the bowling alley with Barney before it closes, and it's natural that the road is full of rocks he can crash on – it's the Stone Age, after all. Actually playing a round of bowling afterwards? That's the most natural thing in the world. We can even accept the idea of Pebbles inexplicably making her way onto a dangerous construction site, because it's the sort of peril she might cause in the cartoon. It's not adequately explained, but it's in the proper spirit of things.

The opening stage though, oh boy. Fred has to paint the walls of his house because Wilma's parents are coming to visit. While he's doing it, he's got to look after Pebbles, who wants nothing more than to scribble all over your pristine walls – and every time he picks her up, his small dinosaur paintbrush runs away instead. The painting process is tedious, as the brush becomes useless well before the paint meter runs to zero, and the time limit is so punishing as to leave most players stuck there, endlessly juggling babysitting and dull chores. Sure, you can argue that it's a game for kids, but I'm blown away that anyone decided that *this* was the best way to capture the spirit of the classic cartoon for them. I'd rather have gone to bed than Bedrock. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE

TAPPER

IT WASN'T ALL KICKING ASS AND SHOOTING ALIENS IN THE ARCADES OF THE EARLY EIGHTIES. CREATED AS A TIE-IN WITH BEER PRODUCER ANHEUSER-BUSCH, THIS FRANTIC BAR SIMULATOR BECAME EVEN MORE POPULAR WHEN REBRANDED INTO A CHILD-FRIENDLY FORMAT FOR ARCADES. LET'S PULL SOME PINTS!

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

» [Arcade] Things are hotting up in the outer space bar.

» [Arcade] Intercepting empties as soon as possible is a good tactic.

"Ian had a reputation for being able to pull some tricks out of the machine that others simply couldn't think of"

DAVID J ANDERSON

» [Arcade] *Tapper*'s attract mode helpfully outlines how to play.

Designed by Marvin Glass Associates' Scott Morrison and Steve Meyer, *Tapper* began life as a simple concept where the player assumes the role of a busy bartender, slinging drinks down a series of slippery bars to the waiting customers. Based around a character called Domino Man (who had previously starred in an eponymous puzzle game), the style and look of *Tapper* would be that of an authentic classic American bar.

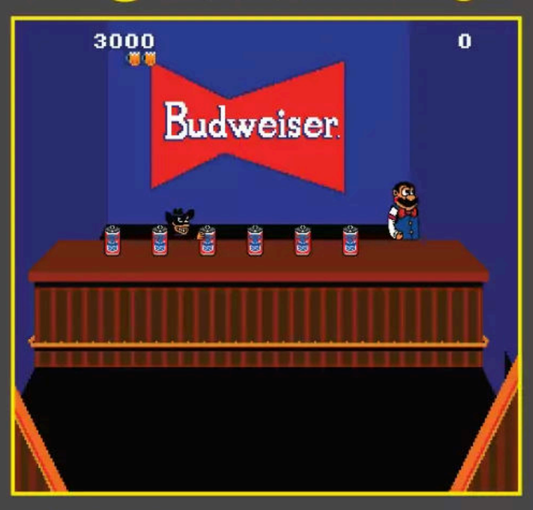
With Marvin Glass and Bally Midway bosses receptive to the idea, the latter company's licensing division hit upon the scheme of linking the game to an official licence with a notable beer company. It was a great way of breaking into the potentially lucrative bar and pub market, utilising a bespoke arcade machine, its game simulating the serving of alcoholic beverages to a range of thirsty customers. And when it came to a tie-in beer partner, there wasn't really any choice other than the King Of Beers, Budweiser, and its producer, Anheuser-Busch. Taking the base concept of serving beers in a pub, *Tapper* features a quartet of long bars within each of its four different drinking establishments. In the first, a Western saloon, a keg sits opposite each bar. Pulling down on the joystick while next to a keg – a proper simulation of drinks pouring – pours a cold one ready for sliding down the bar to a waiting customer. The bartender can nimbly jump from bar to bar, flinging down beer and collecting the empty glasses that come back his way. Occasionally his services will be rewarded with a cash tip, unhelpfully deposited at the far side of the bar. Collection of this not only generates a points bonus but also releases a trio of dancers, temporarily distracting some of the patrons and giving the player a valuable slice of breathing space.

And boy, will you need it, because *Tapper* features some of the most impatient customers in the entire world – and even beyond. Faced with multiple patrons within each bar, they must all be satisfied with a full glass before they reach the end. Should they get there dry, the bartender is unceremoniously flung down his own bar ▶

» [Arcade] Failing to satisfy a customer results in this dramatic animation.

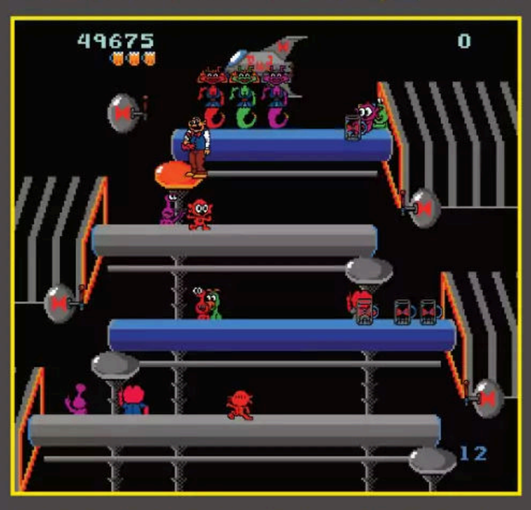
TOPPING TAPPER

KEY TIPS TO KEEP THOSE BAYING CUSTOMERS HAPPY



FIZZ BOMB

Occurring after two cowboy levels, three sports levels and four space/punk levels, this bonus screen gets progressively trickier as the cans move faster and faster. First, keep an eye on which can the villain *doesn't* shake; then watch closely as they juggle around. Get it right and there's a 3,000 point bonus. Get it wrong and it's a face-full of Bud.



BRING ON THE DANCING GIRLS

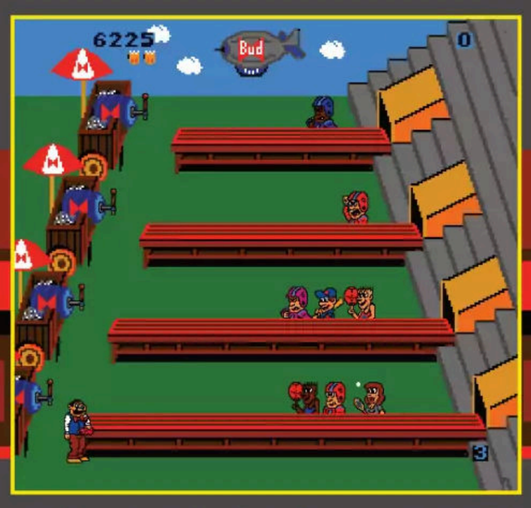
Some customers leave a tip – collect it and a trio of dancers appears at the top of the screen, distracting a portion of your clientele. While this can help in tricky situations, it's a double-edged sword – the watching customers will ignore any mugs of beer that fly past them, meaning the barkeep has to carefully watch who needs serving and who's otherwise occupied.

MILK THE BEER

The first level in *Tapper* is the calmest and it can be milked for a good score by canny players. While each customer served only scores 50 points on this level, collecting the empties attains double that while there's still the occasional tip to be snagged. Keep one customer pinging back and forth while quickly sating the others to keep things under control.

RUNNING THE BAR

There are a couple of useful little tricks to manoeuvring this barman around his place of work. Both tips and returning glasses can be preemptively collected by dashing down the bar to seize them. Should you need to rapidly start serving again, a quick tap of the fire button will place the bartender at the end of the bar again, poised to pull another mug.



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM... AND BACK

There's also a useful warp move in *Tapper*, and as the glasses and customers begin to fly, it's essential to take advantage of this technique. When occupying the bottom bar, tapping down instantly warps the bartender all the way to the top bar. Once you've served those customers, one push upwards and you're back down at the bottom.

ONE MUG TOO MANY

Watching how many customers appear at the end of the bar is key. Should they be close enough to the entrance, they'll be pushed back out until none are left and the level is complete. But with the later levels becoming increasingly hectic, it pays to keep an eye on the number of incoming patrons; one mug too many and it'll go crashing to the floor.

CONVERSION CAPERS

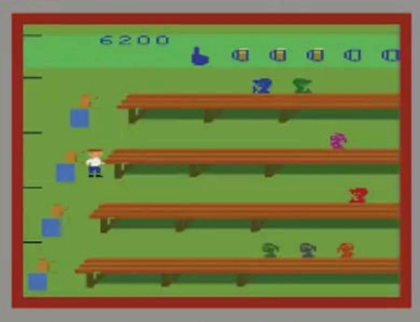
RETRO GAMER STUMBLES BACK HOME TO CHECK OUT HOW TAPPER FARED ON HOME SYSTEMS

AMSTRAD CPC

Tapper's vibrant colours are present and correct in this Amstrad conversion, published by Sega/US Gold and Amsoft. The bar-related mayhem is well presented on the computer; alas the lack of control responsiveness makes it a little too frustrating. Sponsored by Pepsi, it's a shame the speed is sacrificed; still, it looks nice and has the original Bud *Tapper* version of the barman.

APPLE II

This version is beautifully detailed, especially during its outside sports level, with a crisp blue sky overlooking a verdant field and its old-fashioned beer carts. Like most of the home conversions, it utilises a one-touch beer delivery system, although this supposedly more efficient method has a habit of sticking, resulting in many a spilled mug of beer. Not a bad effort on the ancient computer, but one of the weakest *Tappers*.

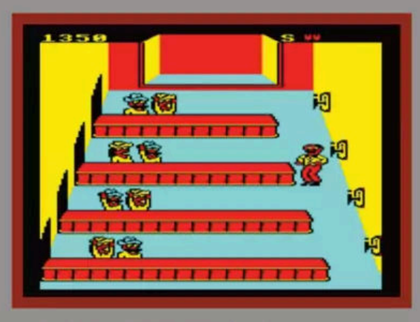


ATARI 2600

There's a surprising amount of colour and detail to this Atari port of *Tapper*, and it plays well too. The bartender still zips around, but can only serve two beers at a time, which somewhat hampers the game's momentum, as does the off-key tune. There are also no tips, but all four bars are present and it's a good game, all things considered. The kid-friendly Mountain Dew stands in for beer.

ATARI 8-BIT

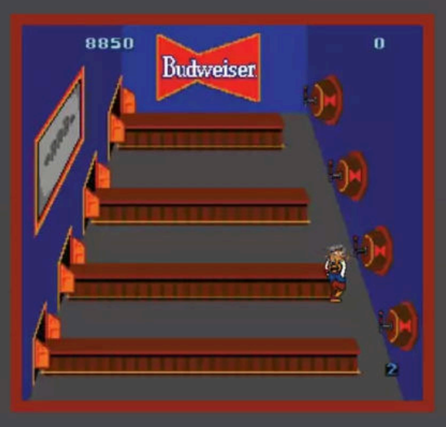
The bartender whips the root beers down the bar in this Atari 8-bit game, and he moves around rather swiftly as well. While the colours are somewhat washed out – and the bonus game is stripped of the waiting barman and only has five cans – this is still a recognisable and entertaining port of the Bally Midway arcade game.



BBC MICRO

US Gold enlisted the help of BBC Micro specialists Micro Power to assist with this port and while it did a fair job, it still disappoints. The garish colour scheme is a little distracting, but worse is the shrill music and fussy drinks dispensing. The second level's bright green and blue hues are particularly ugly, but it all hangs together OK in terms of gameplay. Just about.

» [Arcade] Thirsty sports fans quaff their Buds in level 2.



» [Arcade] Empty mugs are soon flying everywhere.

» [Arcade] Can you beat the devilish shaker?

COLECOVISION

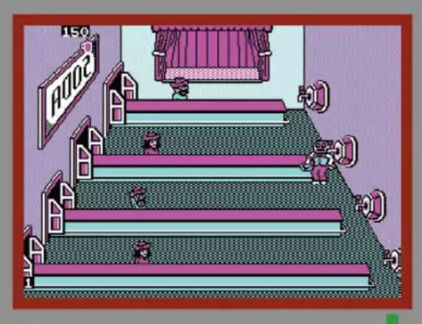
Coleco took on development of *Tapper* itself and did a reasonable job of integrating the fast-paced arcade game into the ColecoVision. There's an odd jumping effect with the full mugs but a neat little speed graphic makes up for this. Unfortunately, the console begins to strain as things get a bit hectic, rendering the game more a test of luck than skill. You do get a dancing monkey, though, so that's something.

COMMODORE 64

The limitations of the arcade original are perhaps a little too exposed in this graphically fine Commodore 64 game. Initially zippy and fun, it really looks the part and is probably the best of the 8-bit ports, especially when you factor in its superior musical accompaniment. Great for a quick session, but C64 fans were already expecting better gameplay-wise, although it certainly trumps its close rivals the Spectrum and Amstrad.

ZX SPECTRUM

Despite the bartender appearing to serve cups of tea rather than mugs of beer, this Spectrum iteration of *Tapper* is a good effort, representing all the zip and chaos of the arcade original. Again, the controls have been slightly altered – now the player just taps once to pour and serve – yet despite boasting an even tougher difficulty curve, this is a respectable conversion by David Anderson and Ian Morrison. The 'music', however, is awful.



PC

As you'd probably expect, the CGA graphics and farty PC sound effects don't exactly do *Tapper* any justice at all. The controls and pace of the game are accurately mapped however, and once you get past the somewhat primitive display, it's a moderately decent attempt at recreating the Marvin Glass game. Some sources cite Sierra On-Line as the game's developers.

and a life is lost. Additionally, failure to collect the empties results in a shattered glass and another barman consigned to the bins round the back. Finally, should you chuck a beer down a bar with no waiting customer, it's another breakage and, you guessed it, another life down.

Following the initial Budweiser-themed traditional cowboy bar, there's a sports arena (complete with helmet-wearing customers and beer carts). Next is a dishevelled punk pub – where the doors are literally hanging off by their hinges – and a club in outer space, the inky blackness of space punctured by the neon furniture and a strange array of colourful alien customers. The cowboy and punk pubs have a Budweiser sign at the top of the screen while at the sports bar, a Bud blimp hovers over the frenetic action. Suitably, the space level sees the Bud logo emblazoned on a sleek grey spaceship, ready to tell the galaxy about the delights of overly fizzy lager. Jolly tunes accompany each level, most notably Stephen Collins Foster's classic *Oh Susanna* and the *Can-Can*, appropriately played whenever the dancing girls take to the stage.

The original Western-themed bar inspires the 'sliding' concept of *Tapper* along with the bartender's period clothing. As is common for arcade games, designed to lure the player in before ramping up the difficulty, *Tapper* begins calmly as customers appear slowly, and those thirsty regulars help to engender the jovial atmosphere in the game. Men and women sporting ten-gallon hats bang on the bar demanding their beers. Sports fans spin basketballs and bounce tennis balls; spiky-haired punks include a nutter with a giant safety pin impaled through his skull; and finally, that gleefully weird array of big-nosed and gurning aliens, each one charging down the bar with an anxious craving for hydration. Satisfy all the customers and the bartender rewards himself with a drink or two himself, throwing the empty glass into the air before it falls with any number of comic effects. Sometimes he coolly backheels it; other times it slots neatly onto his head. Whatever happens, it's a nice visual reward for completing one of *Tapper*'s demanding levels.

Basic scoring is achieved in two ways in *Tapper* – serving and clearing up. Each satisfied customer nets between 50 and 150 points depending on the level, while throughout the game, collecting empties and tips notches 100 and 1,500 points respectively. Between each scenario there's the opportunity to gain a further score bonus by competing in a minigame. Six cans sit on a bar; while the tender is not looking, a shifty rogue shakes all but one of the cans, which are then rapidly swapped around. Should the player keep a close eye on the unshaken can and open it, there's a nice addition of 3,000 points to go with the 1,000 for completing the earlier level. Get it wrong, and the agitated contents shower the poor barkeep.

» [Arcade] Quiet night, huh?

"With Tapper we made some really tough technical choices"

DAVID J ANDERSON

» [Arcade] Watch the cans closely and a cold one is yours.

» [Arcade] Clearing a screen results in a humorous interlude.

"Most of the processor power and time is dedicated to oscillating the tweeter to make the sound"
DAVID J ANDERSON

▶ Original in concept, *Tapper* is also a distinctive arcade game thanks to its numerous versions. First up to the bar was the official Anheuser-Busch licence, the Budweiser logo prominent throughout the game and the cabinet itself styled to look at home inside a real-life bar. The twin sticks each have a Bud handle, while the sepia tone side image portrays a pressured barman pulling beer into Budweiser-branded glasses. There's even an ashtray (or glass holder) each side of the control panel. Concerned by the idea that *Tapper* may encourage minors to purchase alcohol, Bally Midway remoulded the game into *Root Beer Tapper* when it became popular enough to venture into arcades. A more comical image was created for the side-art as any in-game reference to Bud was replaced with generic root beer. Also gone were the Budweiser-emblazoned joystick knobs, while the main character was altered from bartender to soda jerk. Finally, in the early Nineties, another version of *Tapper* surfaced, supposedly sponsored by Japanese liquor company Suntory. However, with all those involved (including Japanese distributor Sega) denying any official licence, it seems unlikely that this game is anything more than a curio or hack.

Despite its popularity, there were to be no further arcade adventures of this overloaded bartender, although that didn't stop UK software house US Gold developing a number of home versions in conjunction with Sega. Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum, BBC Micro and Commodore 64 games all appeared in 1984 and 1985 with their respective programmers doing a commendable job of recreating the pandemonium of the arcade game. Coleco had a go at producing its own ColecoVision port, while Sega itself apparently handled the Atari and Apple II games.

Back in the arcades, that original, Budweiser-themed cabinet, beautifully designed in the style of a genuine American bar, is the one that collectors aspire to own today. Yet whatever version you plump for, with its unique beer-tap-styled controller and diverse gameplay, *Tapper* remains a legend of arcade gaming, and one of the most characteristic videogames of its generation. ✱

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID J ANDSERSON

HOW DID THE SPECTRUM VERSION COME ABOUT?

Retro Gamer perches on a barstool and chats to the man behind *Tapper* with David J Anderson, today the CEO of the David J Anderson School Of Management, back then the man responsible for bringing drinks serving mayhem to the ZX Spectrum.

How did you get involved with *Tapper*?
I had a retainer contract to write games for Ocean/US Gold and mostly they asked me to code the conversions of Atari and Commodore 64 games from the US and arcade games, most of which were published on the US Gold label.

Had you played much of *Tapper* prior to your involvement?
Yes, it was in our local arcade in my hometown in Scotland.

Your Spectrum version of *Kung Fu Master* was based on the Commodore 64 game – was it the same for *Tapper*?
I honestly don't recall but it makes sense that we may have had access to the C64 version as I know that we certainly didn't have access to the arcade machine at my home office. We did visit local arcades, spending hours playing or watching others play, often in Soho, London. It was so different then, a mixture of movie studio offices, arcades and overpriced hostess bars. Luckily we were too young and geeky to be distracted by any of that at the time!

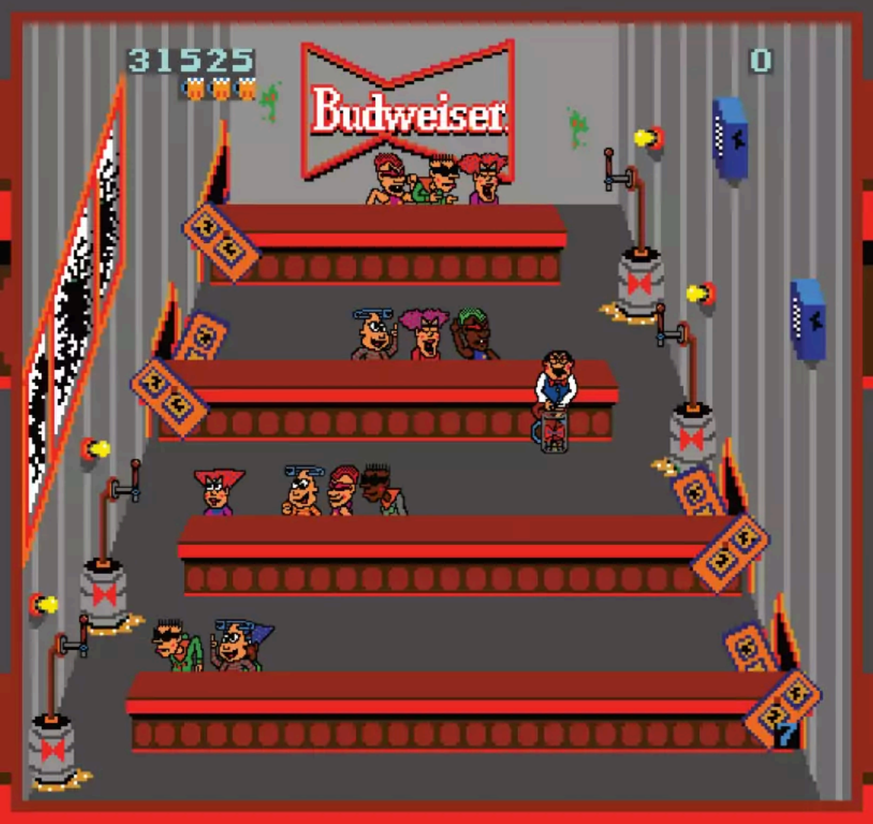
Was anyone else involved with the Spectrum version?
My collaborator was Ian Morrison. We also used some school friends to work on the music. Ian had a reputation for being able to pull some tricks out of the machine that others simply couldn't think of.

The game controls really sharply on the Spectrum – how did you achieve this?
The weird thing is that *Tapper* on the Spectrum is basically a synthesiser algorithm playing the music. The game code runs in the processor interrupts as a background process. Most of the processor power and time is dedicated to oscillating the tweeter to make the sound.

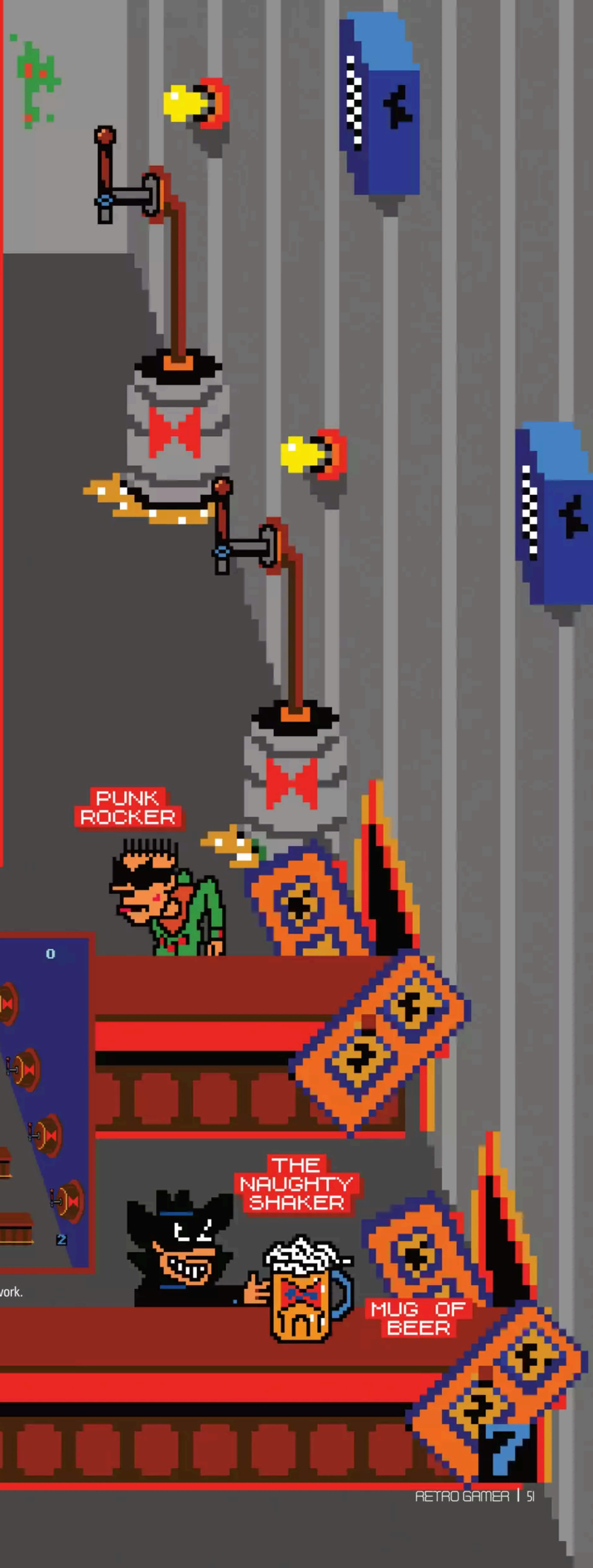
***Tapper* reviewed really well – were you pleased with the reception?**
Yes, I think we were thrilled to be honest. It came at the end of a purple patch for us as a team. With *Tapper* we made some really tough technical choices and we were both thrilled and relieved that people appreciated the hard work and skill that had gone into it. The game was really fast and smooth and the controls sharp. That was all a factor of our choice not to double-buffer the screen and not use masked sprites.

Looking back today, is there anything you'd do differently?
There were always choices and consequences. I think on balance we did the best we could with the platform we had and created an authentic arcade experience for those at home on a low budget and with a Spectrum and portable TV in their bedroom.

Our thanks to David for his time.



» [Arcade] Bartending in *Tapper* can be exhausting work.



Hardware Heaven

Intellivision II

» **MANUFACTURER:** Mattel Electronics » **YEAR:** 1983
» **COST:** $150 (launch), £125+ (today, boxed), £55+ (today, unboxed)

The original Intellivision was a decidedly Seventies design, with its gold panels and wood-effect front, and it was quite bulky and complex to manufacture too. So Mattel Electronics decided, as companies often do, to refresh the Intellivision product line by introducing a new hardware model. The resulting white plastic model was smaller, cheaper to make and sported a look that was inescapably Eighties. It was also significantly uglier. At least the redesigned controllers, which now lacked the bubble effect on the numerical pad, were detachable and therefore easy to replace. The new external power supply was easier to replace but many have been lost today, resulting in plenty of untested consoles for sale.

There were some changes under the hood as well. The cartridge port supported the System Changer accessory by default, allowing for easy access to Atari 2600 games, whereas the first model needed to be modified to use it. The internal Exec ROM was updated, with the goal of locking out third-party software from Coleco, but the effect didn't last long. The sound chip was also updated. This resulted in some unintended consequences – some games had altered sound effects, while *Super Pro Football* later had an invisible quarterback bug because it wasn't tested on the console. *

ESSENTIAL GAME
Night Stalker

This perennially popular Intellivision original is quite an unusual twist on the maze game genre for its time. You take control of a man who finds himself in a terrible situation, hunted by spiders, bats and robots in a dark and deadly maze. You'll spend plenty of time fleeing these terrors, but scoring points requires you to pick up a gun and shoot the baddies – but with each gun holding just six shots, you frequently become defenceless. Like so many classic games, the simplicity of the premise is offset by a difficulty level that gradually increases over the course of play.

Intellivision II fact

■ The videogame market crash of 1983 resulted in the Intellivision II being confined to North America, and also one of gaming's most drastic hardware price cuts – from $150 to $69 in mere months.

RAM: 524B MAIN MEMORY, 932B GRAPHICS MEMORY

PROCESSOR: GENERAL INSTRUMENTS CP1610 16-BIT CPU (894.886 KHZ)

GRAPHICS: STANDARD TELEVISION INTERFACE CHIP (GENERAL INSTRUMENTS AY-3-8900-1)

AUDIO: GENERAL INSTRUMENTS AY-3-8914 (3 CHANNEL MONO)

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE

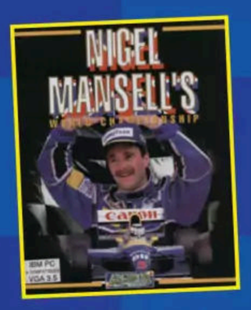
SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE MAKING OF

Nigel Mansell's World Championship

BEFORE LEWIS HAMILTON (AND JENSON BUTTON), THERE WAS NIGEL MANSELL, THE FORMULA ONE ACE WHO FINALLY WON THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN 1992 – THE SAME YEAR, INCIDENTALLY, THAT GREMLIN DECIDED TO CREATE A RACING GAME IN HIS HONOUR!

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **DEVELOPER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** RACING

Nigel Mansell was once a household name – a British racing driver who had competed in Formula One championships with Lotus, Williams and Ferrari during a long and skilful career. In January 1992, he was getting ready to embark on yet another season having come second behind Ayrton Senna the year before. And with the Williams FW14B at his disposal, the racing world had high hopes of his ultimate success.

By this point, Gremlin Graphics was also something of a big name, in videogames at least. The company had built a reputation for developing a series of hit racing games, among them *Lotus*, *Super Cars* and *Toyota Celica GT Rally*, and it was now looking to create another. Almost immediately, the company's marketing director, former teacher David Martin, had a great idea. "I'd already worked with Nigel Mansell at my own company, Martech Games," David explains, of the publisher he'd founded in 1982 and sold five years later. "We'd published *Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix* and his agent, Sue Membury, had been really helpful to us so we had a great working relationship."

As such, David made a second approach, working through Nigel Mansell Services Limited. "There was already another publisher negotiating the licence, but because I knew Sue so well, she was happy to work with me and we nipped in and grabbed it," David continues. This certainly went down well with Gremlin founder Ian Stewart but it was still a bit of a gamble. "A lot of people didn't actually like Mansell," Ian laughs. "But he was a really nice guy."

Now that the licence was in the bag, Gremlin looked to assemble an in-house team to work on the game's development. The biggest decision at this stage was whether to go for an all-out arcade title or lean more towards simulation. In the end, the publisher opted for a bit of both, albeit with the emphasis on arcade – something the company felt would appeal to a wider number of potential players.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1990

ZOOL
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1992

PREMIER MANAGER
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1992

Since the 8-bit market was on the wane, it felt wise to concentrate on 16-bit development first and foremost. "We had moved to 16-bits at this time and we felt it wasn't worth using our resources making the 8-bit formats a priority," says Ian. To that end, they looked to develop the game primarily for the Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, Mega Drive and DOS. Other versions, however, would be developed quickly too. "As I recall, the lead version was the Amiga but I'm not 100% certain," David offers. What we do know is that the audio was produced on the Amiga, with Patrick Phelan among those producing the sounds of the cars and music including national anthems. Graphics were created on the Amiga, too, and senior artist Paul Gregory played a vital role in producing the striking visuals for the 16-bits.

"A LOT OF PEOPLE DIDN'T ACTUALLY LIKE MANSELL BUT HE WAS A REALLY NICE GUY"
IAN STEWART

Indeed, the art team used Deluxe Paint to create the vehicles, backgrounds and menus (the god of art packages for 8/16-bit games," says fellow artist Pete Daniels). Even so, in an interview with *Game Zone* magazine, Paul said his small crew was only able to work with 16 colours on-screen at one time as opposed to the 256 a PC could offer. He also said developing on a PC would have made a difference for the SNES version in particular, a console that allowed for 256 colours.

Not that it really suffered on the SNES much. The team assigned to this version appeared to throw themselves into its development, bringing on board some experienced hands including programmer Ritchie Brannan who had worked on Gremlin's *Top Gear*, which was also released for the SNES.

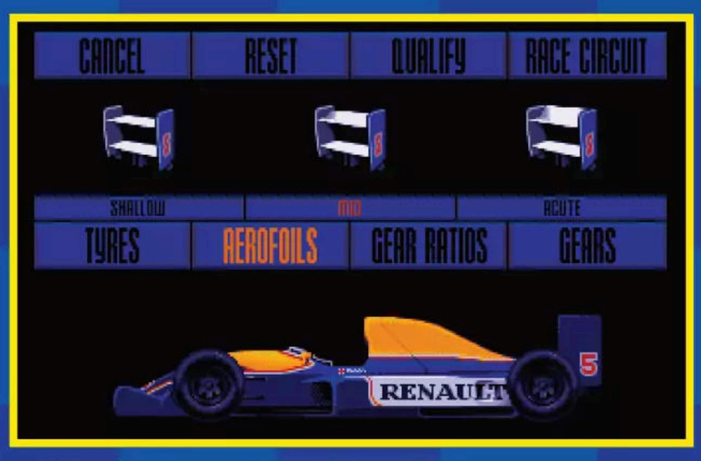
"I was assigned to the team from the start," says Ritchie, "although in these still relatively early days of the games industry there were not 'teams' as such. Everything was rather ad-hoc based on availability and skills or experience." Even so, strong attempts were made by Gremlin to play to the strengths of each platform.

"The SNES game was written in 65816 assembly language [on a PC] and it relied very heavily on the specific hardware of the console," Ritchie continues. "It meant the code was not directly re-used for the other platforms. In fact, we used the same engine that I had developed for *Top Gear*, so that had a huge influence on the SNES development.

It certainly proved to be a solid foundation for the game. "The engine already had an improved road map that was implemented during its development," Ritchie continues. "The codebase also branched to be the basis of *Top Gear 3000* [a game released in 1995, again for the SNES] but that diverged quite significantly because of the use of the FX chip."

Since the game was going to be based on the 1992 Formula One World Championship season, a lot of the key decisions were set in stone right from the start. The developers knew they had to include 16 circuits from South Africa to Australia, for instance. They were also able to use some other star driver names although these would vary across the different versions (the SNES version included Ayrton Senna while Martin Brundle, Johnny Herbert and Eric van de Poele were included in the Amiga version at the expense of Michael Schumacher, Mika Häkkinen and Karl Wendlinger).

"I believe everything stemmed from the contact with Nigel Mansell and through him to the Grand Prix Drivers Association for the rights to use other names," Ritchie says. "I've a feeling that the tracks were licensed individually because I'm pretty sure that we were trying to avoid FIA involvement."

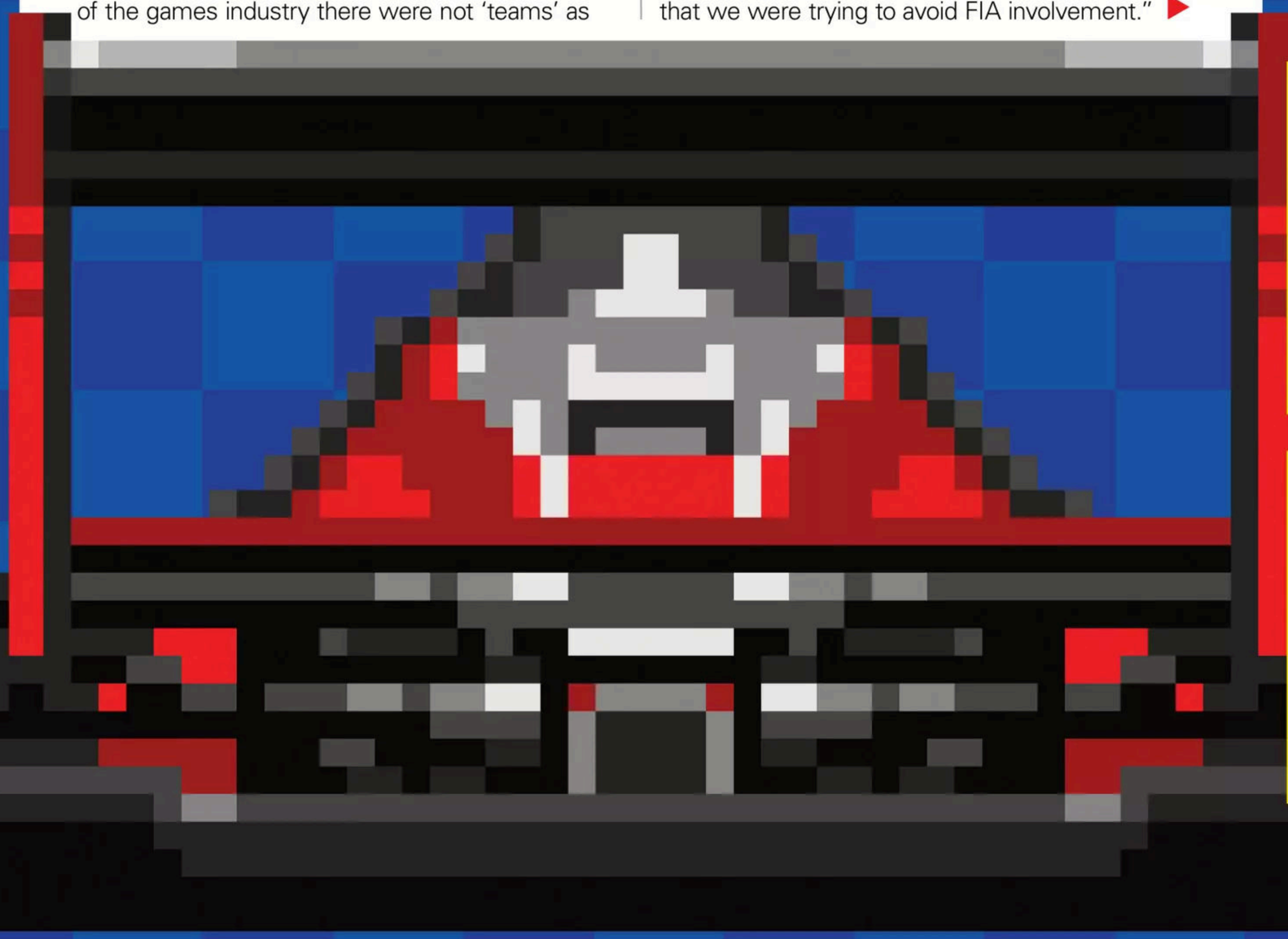


» [Amiga] Before a race, the game allows you to customise your car – Mansell's infamous Red 5.

» [Amiga] Mansell can give some 'helpful' tips such as avoiding hitting stuff. Thanks Nigel!

» [Amiga] The graphics were created using Deluxe Paint on the Amiga.

SOUTH AFRICA
CIRCUIT LENGTH: 2.648 MILES
SET HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS, THE MAJOR CHALLENGE
IS TO OVERCOME THE EFFECTS OF THIN AIR.
THE REDUCTION IN AIR PRESSURE MEANS LESS DRAG,
BUT THE OXYGEN STARVED ENGINES PRODUCE LESS POWER.
ONE OF THE SHORTEST CIRCUITS, WITH A FEW LONG HILLS.
WEATHER REPORT:
DRY
00%
TUNE CAR
QUALIFY
RACE CIRCUIT
CANCEL

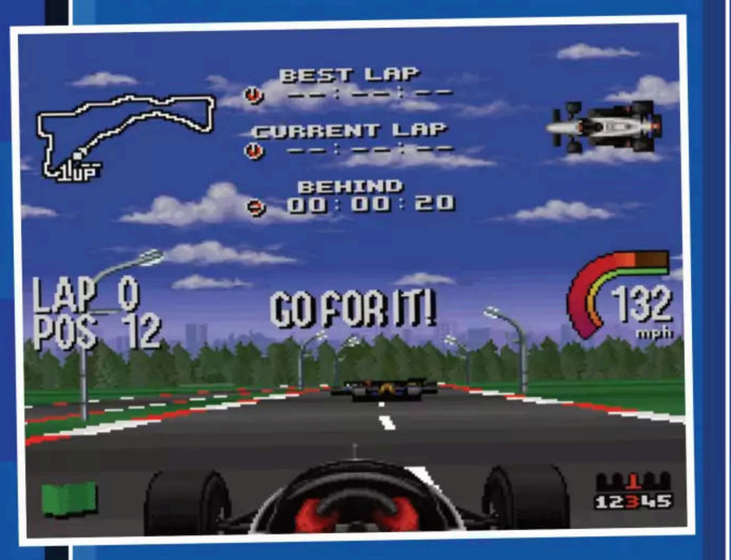


More Mansell

THE MOUSTACHIOED MASTER APPEARED IN TWO OTHER RACERS

NEWMAN/HASS INDYCAR FEATURING NIGEL MANSELL

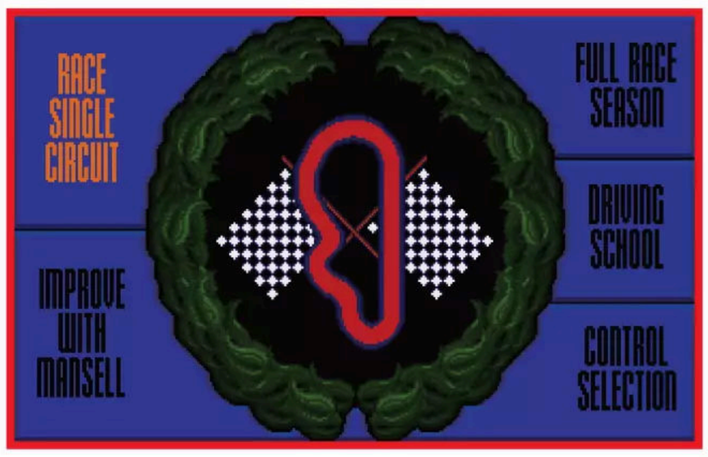
Mansell left Formula One to conquer IndyCar in 1993 but the relationship he had built with Gremlin continued. As such, in 1994, the same engine that had been used for *Nigel Mansell's World Championship* was dusted down and built upon for this subsequent release yet, sadly, rival driving games were racing ahead by this point. The SNES version in particular looked especially dated. The Mega Drive version had more detail but it ran at a slower pace.



NIGEL MANSELL'S GRAND PRIX

Claiming to be an accurate simulation of Formula One racing, *Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix* was a split-screen affair released in 1988. The action took place at the top of the display but a large instrument panel lay beneath, giving you all manner of data from the rev counter and speed, to the amount of fuel and water temperature. The game was created by father and son Dave and John Looker with Mansell acting as a technical consultant. It's hard to fault its ambition.

» [Amiga] The game wasn't all that difficult so most players would be able to win races.



» [Amiga] Players have a few simple options at their fingertips from a single race to a full season.

Having a licence and basing the game on a real-life motorsport did place restrictions on the dev teams. "Unlike with *Top Gear*, we were not going to be able to use large sweeping hills and the like to give a sense of urgency, speed and modification of acceleration profiles," Ritchie explains. "It meant moving on to a licensed project, initially felt very restrictive."

By opting for an arcade angle, however, there was more artistic licence, as well as the opportunity to pull off a few tricks. "We made a lot of alterations to the car handling while still keeping with an arcade feel," says Ritchie. "But we were also careful to make sure that the corners matched the actual tracks as much as possible, including using some crash statistics to adjust the driving difficulty."

Ritchie explains that there were always going to be limits regarding how realistic the physics could be – "or, more importantly, could be seen" – because of the fake-3D tech that was being used. "We felt that the biggest audience was for arcade-style games and that we had a relatively small development window to release the game while it still had relevance. We also had to be able to recoup the licensing costs."

Fortunately, recouping those costs wasn't going to be much of an issue. As development got underway, the 1992 Formula One World Championship also began and there was a growing sense of excitement in the air as Mansell got off to an amazing start, winning his first five races – raising the prospect of him finally becoming the first British F1 champion since James Hunt in 1976. It at least showed good timing on Gremlin's behalf, leading to an even greater, more determined effort to make the most of the association with Mansell. This wasn't simply going to be a case of slapping the driver's name and face on the box. Gremlin was going to try and make the most of its key asset.

Mansell's visage, for instance, appeared in the game as a graphic and, the racing driver was also given his own sprite complete with his moustache, cap and team colours, "He was the only driver we had a full licence for," Ritchie says.

The aim of the game was to steer the British driver to victory over his 11 rivals and there was even a mode called Improve With Mansell that, in most versions, included a digitised image of his face during a race. Mansell would offer words of encouragement and instructions – primarily telling players to stay on the track and not hit everything in sight. The SNES version allowed gamers to hear from the man himself, too. "Mansell's voice was done by someone in the office who had roots in Birmingham," coder Mark Glossop tells us.

> "WE HAD GOT FOOTAGE FROM SOME F1 CARS AND THE THING WE NOTICED WAS JUST HOW LOW TO THE TRACKS THE DRIVERS WERE"
> RITCHIE BRANNAN

Mark recalls contributing to the graphics by creating a sky editor "to get some nice gradients". He also recalls writing "a primitive sprite grabber" and "we would manually grab sprites off the screen using crosshairs and rectangles", he says. "I think I may have come up with some of the trackside objects, too, although, in hindsight, telephone poles were probably not the best idea!"

There were some interesting quirks. The game was designed so that the player would sit behind the wheel of a car that sat very low on the screen. The exception was in the Mega Drive version where the player viewed the outside of their car from a third-person perspective. "The car [in the Mega Drive version] was drawn from an Airfix model of Nigel's car which sat above my monitor," says Pete. "I rotated it around to different angles when drawing the spin-out sequence."

The decision to go with an in-car perspective was intriguing. "We had got footage from some F1 cars and the thing we noticed was just how low to the tracks the drivers were and how restricted their view of the track and corners was," Ritchie says. "The drivers really need to know the track and we wanted our players to also feel that they improved as they learned the layouts." This perspective was also useful in a couple of other respects. "It grounded the car graphics and avoided the cars looking even more cartoonish which they would have done if drawn with an upward slope," Ritchie continues. "It also allowed us to have a feeling of a long draw distance for the places where we did have some

MEXICO
CIRCUIT LENGTH: 2.747 MILES
ANOTHER HIGH ALTITUDE TRACK, WITH LOTS OF TWISTS AND TURNS AND ONE VERY LONG STRAIGHT ALLOWING IMPRESSIVE SPEEDS TO BE BUILT UP. BASED ON A DRY LAKE BED, THIS IS A VERY BUMPY CIRCUIT, AND IS ONE OF THE MOST DEMANDING IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP
WEATHER REPORT:
DRY
15%
TUNE CAR
QUALIFY
RACE CIRCUIT
CANCEL

» [Amiga] Before a race, you'd get a course lowdown and see how likely it is to remain dry.

CONVERSION CAPERS

DID ANY VERSION LEAVE THE REST STANDING?

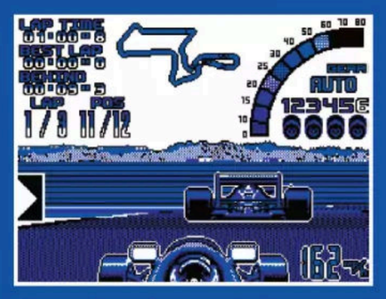
AMIGA

Of the two versions – standard and AGA – the A1200 was obviously the better-looking game, whipping along nicely at a decent framerate and with more detailed graphics. Even without such enhancements, however, the game generated Grand Prix excitement, despite being a tad too easy to pose a great challenge.

ATARI ST

The Atari ST version was a port of the Amiga game with races that ran at the same reasonably brisk pace of its 16-bit peer. While it didn't have as great a tune and suffered jerky animation, it was still fun and – as with the Amiga – it was also possible to control the cars using Logic 3's FreeWheel steering wheel.

AMSTRAD CPC



Boasting some of the finest graphics to have graced the CPC – albeit very blue – this final Gremlin game for Amstrad's debut computer range was something of a winner. A disk-only multi-load release, it had jerky animation and it was hard to avoid collisions with rival cars, but there's no doubting its overall polish.

PC

The menu system on this DOS version didn't quite appear as pretty as on the 16/32-bit versions but otherwise this was a rather faithful port. That said, steering could feel unresponsive at times and despite moving at speed, it would veer a bit too much on the safe side, as if you had even less chance of messing things up as you motored along.

GAME BOY

Porting *Mansell* to Nintendo's tiny screen was no small feat but the developer managed to pull it off courtesy of coder Ali Davidson. Players had the choice of joining a driving school or competing in a single race or a full season. Select Mansell Circuit, though, and you could watch how the master would fare on the track.

MEGA DRIVE

This version feels like a different game with the car viewed from behind rather than within. "I'm pretty sure myself and Mega Drive programmer Phil Rankin were given free reign on the look and we experimented with a few different views (one was extremely pulled out) before settling on the 1/3 screen car size you see in-game," says artist Pete Daniels.

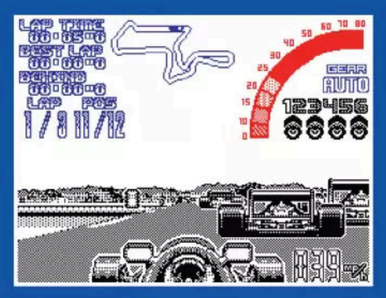
NES

For some reason, this bright and cheery looking game appears to be called *Nigel Mansell's World Championship Challenge* but it's still very much about racing: you have the options of a single circuit, a full season and Improve With Mansell. There's less info about each track, however, and fewer customisation options to play with.

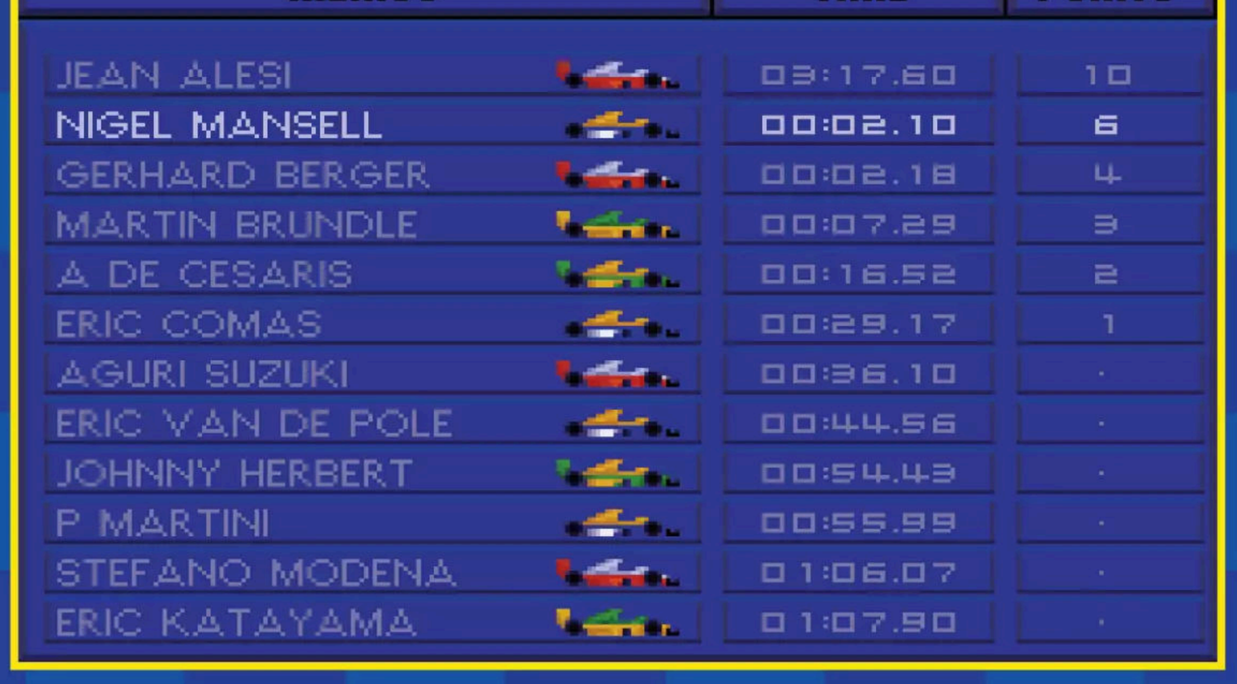
SNES

Arguably the best of all of the versions, making optimum use of the SNES' hardware, this port is blisteringly fast and smooth, taking the racer to a different level and providing a deeper sense of exhilaration. Fire up the Mansell mode and you can hear the driver speak. This is the version you'll want to keep playing.

ZX SPECTRUM



Readers of *Your Sinclair* told Gremlin they wanted to see *Mansell* ported to the Speccy and, having been inundated with replies, the developer put Mike Chilton on the job. He created a monochrome interpretation of the game that ran a little slow (he also produced the CPC version), but it retained most features of the 16-bit versions.



» [Amiga] The game used real-life racing drivers but the focus was obviously on Mr Mansell.

» [SNES] Uh oh! It's raining so that is going to affect your race. Time to make a decision.

Mastering Mansell

THESE TIPS ARE ENOUGH TO MAKE EVEN MANSELL ENVIOUS

QUALIFY FIRST

■ Although it is possible to zoom from twelfth place into first, trying to qualify for each of the races can put you in a much better position on the grid. You may find that your car is not accelerating as fast as your opponents' so grab the advantage.

LEARN THE COURSES

■ The more familiar you are with the courses, the better you'll be at anticipating the twists and turns. But another way of keeping one step ahead is to glance at the course pictured at the top of the screen where you'll also see your opponents' positions.

GO FOR AUTO

■ You can choose manual transmission for faster acceleration but if you opt for auto then it means you're not having to think too much about yet another button press. In truth, the margins between manual and auto are small enough to take the easier ride.

ANTICIPATE THE CORNER

■ If you seek Mansell's advice, then you'll be told the ideal speed to take each corner. But, in general, you should be easing up before you reach a turn and accelerating towards the end of the corner. That way you are less likely to become a cropper.

GET EXTRA SPEED

■ If you want to go faster, then you need to choose a low aerofoil but be warned that you may then struggle to handle the car. There's always a trade off between handling and speed so maybe go for broke only when you feel you've got a grips on the controls.

CHECK YOUR TYRES

■ These four icons indicate how worn your tyres are – the fewer icons there are here, the more worn the tyres are. In general, you don't really have to pay much attention to them but when it starts to rain, you must consider a pit stop to finish in style.

» [SNES] If you wanted to change the tyres, you simply needed to pull into the pit.

» [SNES] The game reproduced real-life tracks, some of which had lots of variety.

slopes which we felt added to the immersion and sense of travel down the track."

In many other ways, however, it felt like a standard racing game. As Ritchie says, the track visuals consisted of a large character-based window containing a pyramid-like shape with coloured stripes running vertically down it. "This was then transformed using horizontal-blanking interrupts which changed the scroll position and various colour registers (and did some sprite multiplexing). The horizon used a separate character window so we could use a separate character set for the graphics there. The start banner used a combination of sprites for the poles with a carefully-timed horizontal interrupt to change the screen colour, and more sprites to hide the timing variation at the edges. A similar approach was taken for bridges and walls. The game itself got to use what little processing time was left over," Ritchie says. "So keeping it simple and data driven was a must."

To get the point of racing, however, there were a few menus to navigate as well as more effects. "The rotating globe on the screen before the race used a huge amount of memory and we had to develop a dedicated tool to process it into font data," Ritchie adds.

There were also numerous customisation options such as tyres, gear ratios, transmission and rear wing aerodynamics. Did they make much of a difference? "Being somewhat of a sceptic, I doubt they made much difference at all," says Mark. "The enemy cars probably had some rubber banding algorithm so improving your performance probably just upped theirs as well."

» [SNES] Nigel Mansell would verbally dish out advice in this version rather than offer written words.

Ritchie says there was some rubber banding. "It was also a collection of ad-hoc heuristics, very simple engine and grip modelling and simple collisions," he adds. "The modelling was very data driven and hand-tuned but it was also based on some statistics and models that we got from one of the F1 teams.

"The game is obviously not a full 3D engine – it is fundamentally 2D with a data array for the track that included hills, pits, track furniture, grip and speed modifiers and this was also hand-tuned. It was an area where we made significant changes and extensions to the engine coming from *Top Gear* so, yes, the car options did have a significant effect on handling, acceleration, corner grip and the like."

A players' first opportunity to test the effectiveness of any changes they made came with the single qualifying lap giving players a single shot to gain a decent position on the starting grid. "This was a deliberate choice," says Ritchie. "We wanted the game to have an arcade feel and having a full flying lap would have delayed getting into the main race."

> **"WE WANTED THE GAME TO HAVE AN ARCADE FEEL"**
> **RITCHIE BRANNAN**

Adding to the fun was a choice of a single race of a full season, practice sessions, pit stops where you could change tyres, weather changes ("Handled by having separate configuration data for the cars and tracks," says Ritchie) and wing mirrors on the cars so you could see how close rivals were. "The wing mirrors were a late addition although they had been on a wish list from early in development," Ritchie says. "I'm not sure who put them on the list and I can't remember much about the implementation – whether or not they were sprites or character-based – but I remember that clipping them to the mirror surrounds was an issue at the time. The data driving them was from the active collective detection window so it did not require much work."

By the time development was nearing the end, there was great news. Mansell had won the Formula One World Championship. But the driver also had a public disagreement with Williams and he announced in September 1992 that he was signing with the team Newman/Haas Racing to compete in the Indy Car World Series instead. "We'd got most of the way through the project and then Mansell said he was buggering off to America," Ian laughs. "It's maybe why the game didn't hit as hard as it could have done but that's the way the cookie crumbles."

Even so, it wasn't a disaster and there was still a fierce clamour to play the game. The Amiga version was showcased ahead of Christmas at GamesMaster Live in 1992 in what was billed as a Nigel Mansell Experience that allowed up to 14 players to compete simultaneously. The other versions soon zoomed into view, though. "We'd given source assets, source code and documentation to the other teams developing the game for other platforms and we had some face-to-face discussions and Q&A," Ritchie says.

"The port work would have required significant reworking and reinvention to convert the assembly code or just to attempt to recreate similar code." It's perhaps why the Mega Drive version – announced in April 1993 – looks so different. "I'd hazard a guess that they just repurposed a different game, released or unreleased, because it does have a drastically different look," Ritchie offers.

The game also made it to the Amiga CD32 ("I sense my role would have been to blow the Amiga version on to CD," says Mark when reminded he had a credit for that version). The 8-bits weren't left out, though. Gremlin approached Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC magazines to find out how many of their readers wanted the game to be released and, of the three, only the C64 version didn't see the light of day.

It was apparently canned just six weeks away from completion with coder Andrew Bowen and graphics artist Paul McKee having apparently created a fine-looking game with "smooth corners and undulating hills", according to Games That Weren't. Another port – for the Atari Jaguar – was also canned. Nigel Mansell, it would appear, couldn't win them all!

STAGE [1]

Tatsujin

KILL, KILL AND KILL AGAIN

RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE » 1989 » TOAPLAN

A few issues ago I mentioned my love of shmups in our My Retro Life section. I listed some of the things I always look for in a good shoot-'em-up and one of the ones I mentioned was good power-ups. Today, I wanted to talk about another element of power-ups I enjoy – gigantic, screen-filling smart bombs that ideally destroy everything on-screen at once.

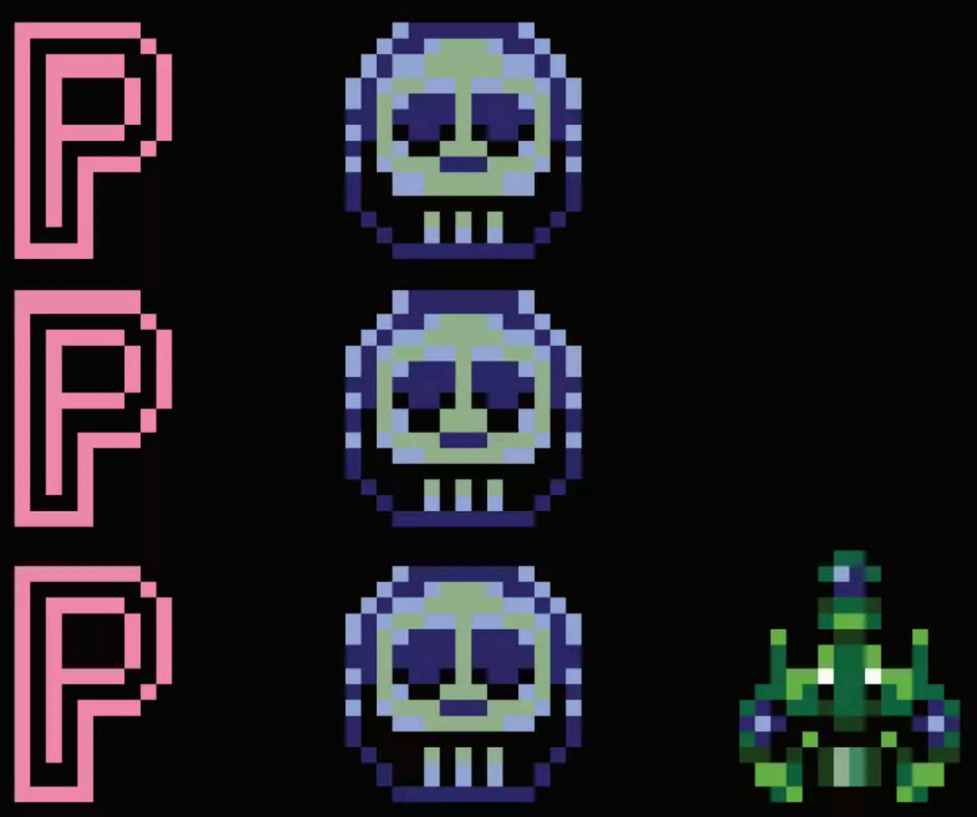
Some of the earliest smart bombs I can remember appeared in *Defender* and *Gradius*. They were effective – destroying all enemies on-screen – but they weren't very exciting to look at. One minute the enemies were there and the next minute they were gone. Hardly very exciting.

As the genre evolved so too did the smart bomb and soon games started to show the impact of these devastating attacks with proper visuals. One of the earliest of these I can remember is from Toaplan's 1985 release *Tiger Heli*. The smart bomb you drop here not only acts as a shield, destroying enemy bullets, but also obliterates anything in its blast radius. It has the added bonus of looking great as well.

While numerous other shmups would perform similar tricks going forward, *Tatsujin* on the Mega Drive (or *Truxton* if you didn't own the Japanese import like I did) was a far flashier affair. You still got the same powerful smart bomb that would virtually destroy everything it touched, but now you got an incredible visual effect in the form of a giant screaming skull as well.

You can almost feel the power of its destruction as it appears on-screen, instantly obliterating everything around it. I don't recall playing *Tatsujin* in the arcades, but I do recall the impact that leering skull had on me when I first unleashed it in Toaplan's excellent Mega Drive port. It screamed power to me and it looked exceptionally cool. In short, it was bloody badass. I was so in awe of it that I pretty much dropped another one almost immediately, just so I could look at it again and marvel at how freakishly ghoulish it looked.

Smart bombs have come a long way since and I've witnessed many others with suitably over-the-top visual pyrotechnics, but none have ever matched the visual impact that *Tatsujin* managed. What a pity. ✱



50 THINGS THAT CHANGED GAMING

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

OUR YOUNG MEDIUM ISN'T QUITE SO YOUNG ANY MORE, AS VIDEOGAMES HAVE NOW BEEN AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC FOR 50 YEARS, SO WE'RE LOOKING BACK AT 50 THINGS THAT HAVE HAD A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE TRAJECTORY OF OUR HOBBY OVER THE LAST FIVE DECADES

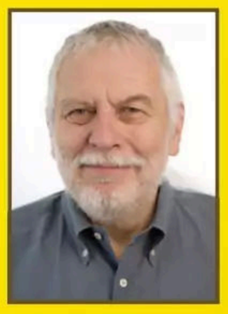
Humanity had accomplished many things by the start of 1971, plenty of them rather impressive – we'd erected great buildings like the pyramids, created beautiful works of art and literature, and invented machines that could take us to the moon. Yet somehow, despite having invented a box that could display moving pictures and play sounds – you know, a television – somehow, nobody had yet figured out a way to sell us games to play on that box. By the end of the year, that had all changed with the introduction of Nutting Associates' *Computer Space*, the first arcade videogame to be sold commercially.

Fifty years have passed since then, and the changes that have taken place since could scarcely have been imagined. There have been companies that have endured for years to shape the direction of the business, technologies that have transformed the possibilities of the medium and landmark games have pushed the boundaries of development. To celebrate this landmark anniversary, we've chosen to highlight 50 of these things, without which games would undoubtedly be very different indeed.

While plenty of the things we'll talk about here are great, greatness alone isn't sufficient to make the list. Everything we speak about here has been chosen for the effect it had on gaming as a whole, whether it made a difference in the past or continues to be influential to this day. You might even believe that some of these things are malign influences on videogames, and that's certainly something to discuss – we'll welcome your comments in the Mailbag pages – but you'd be hard-pressed to argue that any of them didn't matter. So without further ado, let's go back to the very beginning…

Special thanks to David Crookes

COMPUTER SPACE



■ Prior to 1971, the public was wholly unaware of videogames. That's not to say that they didn't exist, mind – they just existed behind closed doors, accessible only to those fortunate few at universities that hosted enormously expensive home computers. The most popular of these early games was *Spacewar!*, a competitive shooting game that spread from institution to institution throughout the Sixties. This was the starting point for Syzygy, an engineering company founded by Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney.

"I was emulating the game *Space War* that I had played in college on a PDP1," Nolan recalls, half a century on from the release of the game. "My objective was to create the first coin-operated videogame. I knew the economics of that business from my experience as manager of the games department at an amusement park where I worked while in college. The cost of integrated circuits had dropped precipitously and I felt confident that I could make the economics work," he explains.

Indeed, those looking for thrills had access to electromechanical amusements and pinball machines, so the business model was well established – it was only the technology that was particularly novel.

The game set the player's spaceship against two computer-controlled UFOs, in a competition to score more hits than the enemy – a popular theme, given the Cold War competition between the USA and the Soviet Union. A brightly coloured plastic cabinet evoked the futurism of the era, and looked considerably fancier than the wooden cabinets that became commonplace as the arcade business grew. "Many decisions that I made were a combination of young exuberance and passion for the subject," Nolan recalls "I thought a sleek, space-aged looking cabinet, which had never been done before, would be proper housing for the game."

"I was confident from the start. The game was so revolutionary for the coin-op market and the state of games at that point," Nolan recalls. It was a modest success for its manufacturer Nutting Associates, but the spaceship proved difficult for players to control. "Although it turned out to be too complex to be a massive success, I was happy with the few million sales it did make. Subsequently we simplified the gameplay with *Pong*, which was a tremendous success," Nolan continues. Indeed, *Computer Space* was not the biggest videogame in the world – but it was the very first one you could put a coin in and play.

PONG

■ When people talk about the origins of videogames, *Pong* has often been cited as the game that launched the industry. You naturally know that's not the case, but the reason it has mistakenly received that accolade so often is simple – it was the first arcade game to achieve widespread success, in part because the simple bat and ball concept was far easier for players to get to grips with than *Computer Space* had been.

Pong was the perfect start for Atari and would propel the company towards a decade of success. Having proven that it could make serious money it was quickly cloned by other companies, which Atari didn't like – but then, it had borrowed the concept from a Magnavox Odyssey game itself. The phenomenon soon invaded the home too, as the first generation of home videogame consoles consisted almost exclusively of devices dedicated to playing variations of *Pong*.

4
7
"PONG WAS TRULY THE FIRST CASUAL GAME AND THE FIRST SOCIAL GAME. EVERYONE PLAYED IT. I MEAN, EVERYONE"
TRIP HAWKINS RETRO GAMER 104

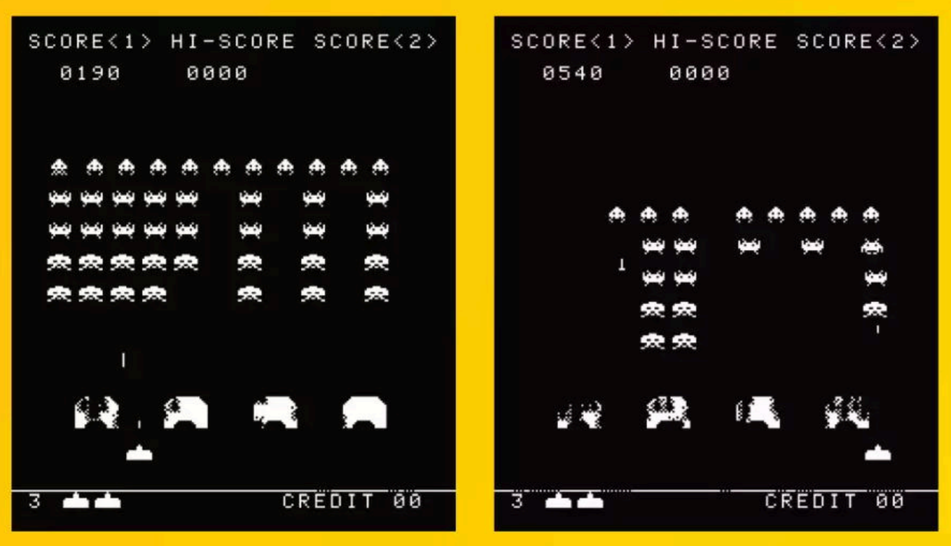
50 THINGS THAT CHANGED GAMING

MAGNAVOX ODYSSEY

■ The very first commercially released home videogame console was invented by Ralph Baer, and released in 1972. Having been conceived in the mid-Sixties, a number of prototypes were produced over subsequent years before Magnavox agreed to manufacture the machine in 1971. The console is a far cry from what we know today, with dial-based controls and board game additions, and was only a modest success – 350,000 units were sold by the time the system was discontinued in 1975, two years after the last game card release.

"WHEN TECHNOLOGY IS READY FOR SOMETHING NOVEL, WHEN THE COMPONENTS NEEDED TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW BECOME AFFORDABLE, IT'S GOING TO GET DONE BY SOMEONE"
RALPH BAER RETRO GAMER 28

The value of the console to Magnavox was not in its sales performance, of course. The Odyssey was a pioneering invention and its patents were enormously valuable. From the late-Seventies to the mid-Nineties, Magnavox made over $100 million in lawsuits and settlements from other videogame companies. Though he worked on some other console projects during the Seventies, the electronic game Simon proved to be Baer's most notable later invention.



SPACE INVADERS

■ Taito's 1978 arcade hit pits you, in a laser cannon, against an armada of extra-terrestrials with one goal in mind – to touch down on Earth and subjugate the planet. All you have is a set of destructible shields to protect you, so you've got to be quick to take out the enemies. It's the invaders themselves that make the game so compelling, as the more of them you kill, the faster they get – and the ominous four-note background music speeds up with them, ratcheting up the tension. They're amongst the earliest truly recognisable videogame characters, to the point that they are a form of visual shorthand for the medium as a whole.

"IF I, AS A GAMES CREATOR WAS TO LOOK BACK IN A POSITIVE WAY, I'D SAY IT HERALDED A NEW ERA OF ENTERTAINMENT IN JAPAN"
TOMOHIRO NISHIKADO, RETRO GAMER 185

The global demand for *Space Invaders* resulted in hundreds of thousands of cabinets being produced, both official and clones, and the game was such a draw that the home conversion for the Atari 2600 became the first home console game to sell a million units. In 1981 the game even became the subject of the first parliamentary attempt to restrict videogame sales, based on concerns over childhood addiction.

ATARI

■ The first true titan of the videogame business was founded in 1972 by Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney, initially to sell *Pong* machines. The company would continue to find arcade success with games like *Tank*, *Asteroids*, *Tempest* and *Missile Command*, and the Atari 2600 was the first home console to achieve major success. Then there was the company's home computer line, which inspired coders including Archer Maclean to get into the business. In 1980, Atari was the fastest growing company in America. By 1983, it was rumoured to be losing $2 million per day. The Tramiel family entered the scene, and did good business with the Atari ST in Europe, but fell behind console competitors and left the market by 1996.

That first decade, during which Atari was able to market the concept of videogames better than any other company, has ensured it a permanent place in pop culture history. That's why you still see people wearing Atari T-Shirts, and it's why companies like Williams, Hasbro and Infogrames have ignored the negative associations with machines like the Jaguar and revived the brand over and over again – it still has value.

ATARI 2600

■ Though the Fairchild Channel F was the first console to use programmable ROM cartridges to deliver an expandable library of games, Atari's machine was the one to take that concept and make a wild success of it. Initially designed with simple games like *Pong* and *Combat* in mind, talented programmers pushed the machine in all sorts of ways and Atari's marketing muscle helped the machine flourish, even in spite of competition from the Intellivision and other machines.

"EVERY COMPANY THAT MAKES VIDEOGAME SOFTWARE IS IN THE BUSINESS BECAUSE OF THE 2600"
DAVID CRANE RETRO GAMER 46

Although Atari could draw on its own library of hit arcade games, it recognised the value of its competitors' games too and it signed landmark licensing agreements in order to bring *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* to the console. These conversions were highly anticipated and delivered massive sales, regardless of later events.

CASSETTES

■ Magnetic tapes had been used for data storage since before videogames, but adoption of the humble compact cassette by home computers was a game changer. Cheap and easy to manufacture, they ultimately enabled the hugely important budget game market to flourish during the Eighties, and could even be mounted on magazine covers. Since they were recordable, they also allowed players to sell their own programs – or more likely, trade pirate copies of the games they'd bought.

PAC-MAN

■ Namco's game was an enormous hit in the early Eighties, and it had every right to be – the game design was compelling, thanks to ghosts with their own personalities and the turnabout gameplay that allowed you to eat them. Many of the games of the Seventies had players control tanks, cars and spaceships, and *Pac-Man* signified a shift towards games based around cartoon-style characters. The game became a cultural phenomenon as a result, with plenty of merchandising, a cartoon, a hit single and sequels.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Sir Clive Sinclair's previous low cost computers had experienced some success, but the ZX Spectrum was much more useful out of the box thanks to its higher memory capacity and colour graphics. The computer was a massive hit in the UK and popular in Spain, selling millions and seeing regular game releases into the early Nineties. However, it was the fact that owners could write their own programs that made the machine so influential – it was the first machine that many coders would have got to grips with. Without the ZX Spectrum providing an accessible pathway to learning programming, it's fair to say that the UK may not have become the hotbed of development talent that it eventually did.

"THIS CONCEPT OF A COMPUTER IN EVERY HOME WAS RIDICULED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS, BUT THE EASE WITH WHICH YOUNG CHILDREN COULD PROGRAM OUR DESIGNS CONVINCED US THAT IT WOULD HAPPEN"

RICHARD ALTWASSER RETRO GAMER 100

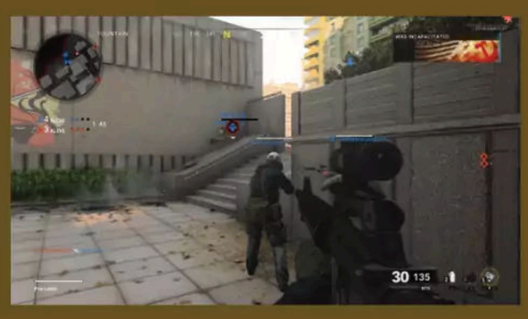
ACTIVISION

■ The first ever third-party publisher in videogames was formed by a group of ex-Atari programmers who felt that they ought to be treated in the same manner as musicians, earning credits and royalties, rather than as factory workers. The company quickly became known for its excellent Atari 2600 games such as *Pitfall!* and *River Raid*, and through its legal defence against Atari, established the concept of a third-party publisher as a legitimate business entity.

The company struggled to survive after the videogame market crash but turned around in the Nineties under the leadership of its sometimes controversial CEO Bobby Kotick, and in 2007 became gaming's largest third party. Today, the company rides high on series such as *Call Of Duty*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* and *Crash Bandicoot*, and owns *World Of Warcraft*, *Diablo*, *Starcraft* and *Overwatch* developer Blizzard Entertainment.

"THE CREATIVE AND TECHNICAL WIZARDS IN THE LABS AT ATARI WERE MAKING THE COMPANY HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS. WE LOVED DOING IT, AND PROBABLY WOULD HAVE CONTINUED DOING SO WITH A LITTLE RECOGNITION"

DAVID CRANE RETRO GAMER 124



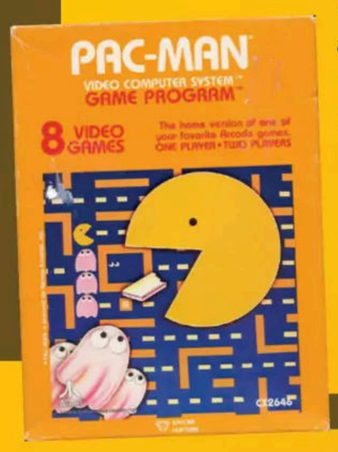
COMMODORE 64

■ Commodore had already pioneered popular computing by producing the first million-selling home computer in the VIC-20, but the Commodore 64 was on a different level, holding the record for the best-selling computer of all time for decades. Its most lasting legacy is the SID chip, an excellent piece of sound hardware that set the machine apart from its peers and made stars of the likes of Ben Daglish and Ron Hubbard. The chip is still used by musicians today.

VIDEOGAME MARKET CRASH

■ Beginning in 1983, the videogame business entered a period of decline for a variety of reasons. Players had their confidence knocked by poor quality games – not only those from third parties rushing to take advantage of an uncontrolled market, but also some of Atari's own, with *Pac-Man* and *ET* often singled out for blame. Retailers had built up massive inventories of games, and mass discounting caused a slump in the sale of full-priced games. Then there was the price war in the home computer market, driven by Jack Tramiel's Commodore.

The effects of the crash were most noticeable in North America but had an international impact, with global videogame revenues in 1985 just a third of their 1982 levels. Formerly viable formats such as the ColecoVision and Vectrex were effectively killed off and their manufacturers left the business, allowing the home computer market to grow in North America and positively boom in Europe. The console market was left wide open for Japanese manufacturers to dominate in years to come, and they learned lessons here, keeping a much tighter control on what the surviving publishers could make for their consoles.



"I NEVER THOUGHT FOR A SECOND IT WOULD STAY DEAD; IT WAS TOO AMAZING A PHENOMENON TO SIMPLY GO AWAY"

HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW, RETRO GAMER 100

ELITE

■ David Braben and Ian Bell's space trading game monopolised hours of players' time on the 8-bit home computers, and for good reason – it was a vast, challenging game with impressive wireframe graphics. *Elite* was notable for the agency it gave to players, as it was an open-ended game that allowed you to chart your own path to success. You could mine asteroids, take on missions for the military or even engage in piracy, with no 'right way' to earn money.

MOUSE

■ The humble mouse didn't become a prominent part of home computer control until the mid-Eighties, but today we can't imagine gaming without it. The device is so entwined with the adventure game scene that they became known as point-and-click games, and it's also massively beneficial in other genres – if you don't believe us, use a controller against a mouse-and-keyboard player in a first-person shooter or a real-time strategy game and see how you get on.

50 THINGS THAT CHANGED GAMING

NINTENDO

The oldest company in our list might not have been the first to get into videogames, but its impact on the business is arguably the most profound. Even before getting into the console business for itself, it was making an impact in that arena by exclusively licensing its arcade hit *Donkey Kong* to Coleco. Since then it has been to the top of the console market, down to the bottom and back more than once, and has led the handheld console market for three decades. Of course it is also one of the finest game creators in the world, partly due to the influence of the world's most renowned developer, Shigeru Miyamoto.

Nintendo only ever does things its own way. The Wii U is proof enough that this isn't always to its advantage, but when it works the results are spectacular. Take the Nintendo DS as an example – it's the second most popular platform of all time, based on the strength of simple touchscreen inputs and non-core games like *Nintendogs* and *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training*. Nintendo doesn't always keep up with trends, but has often set them in spectacular fashion.

"[AT RARE] WE WERE ALL EXPOSED TO A SORT OF NINTENDO ETHOS – THE SUPER MARIO SERIES WAS THE TRUE 'NORTH STAR' THAT GUIDED US"

PAUL MACHACEK, RETRO GAMER 150

NES

The Famicom was a cultural phenomenon in Japan, but the 8-bit console had its biggest impact in North America. Nintendo made bold offers to retailers that were wary of videogames, and they paid off handsomely – with games like *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid*, the NES achieved record-breaking sales, earned a virtual monopoly in the console market, and proved consoles to be more than a fad.

Of course, the NES was also the first console to employ a third-party licensing system, in an attempt to avoid a flood of low-quality software. Publishers had to pay Nintendo a fee and agree to content approval and exclusivity policies, in exchange for the right to publish up to five NES games per year. The exclusivity clause and release limits are thankfully historical relics, but licensing fees and content approval are still standard practice for all console manufacturers today.

FIFA

The power of a good licence can take a game a long way, and while EA's annual football game started off great and is at the top of the league today, it has been carried through low patches by the *FIFA* brand too. Today the game's Ultimate Team mode is a huge money-spinner, and governments have begun to investigate whether loot box mechanics are a form of gambling. The results will undoubtedly impact future gaming business models.

SEGA

There is barely an aspect of the gaming business that Sega hasn't touched in some way. But for all of its contributions to home gaming, Sega began its life in the arcade business and that's where it has been at its most influential. Sega's innovative deluxe cabinets in the Eighties and its 3D arms race with Namco in the Nineties are legendary, and those hardware advances were ably supported by great games, most notably from Yu Suzuki's AM2 studio. Today, it is one of the few major manufacturers still supporting the market.

GAME BOY

As the handheld console market got off to its real start in the late-Eighties, two competing philosophies clashed. Atari's Lynx offered advanced graphical technology and a full-colour display in a bulky package, while Nintendo's Game Boy was a far simpler machine with a greyscale display. While Atari ultimately struggled to compete with Nintendo's software support, Sega's Game Gear didn't – but it still lagged behind the Game Boy.

The Game Boy was proof that the most powerful hardware wasn't always the right hardware, as its low price point and better battery life were far more important than its underwhelming first impressions. Games like *Super Mario Land* and *Pokémon* simply didn't need colour to be compelling, and the console enjoyed a long life and tens of millions of sales as a result.

"ALL THOSE THINGS THAT KIND OF WORKED AGAINST IT ALSO WORKED IN ITS FAVOUR – IT MADE A VERY ECONOMICAL SYSTEM"

JEREMY PARISH RETRO GAMER 196

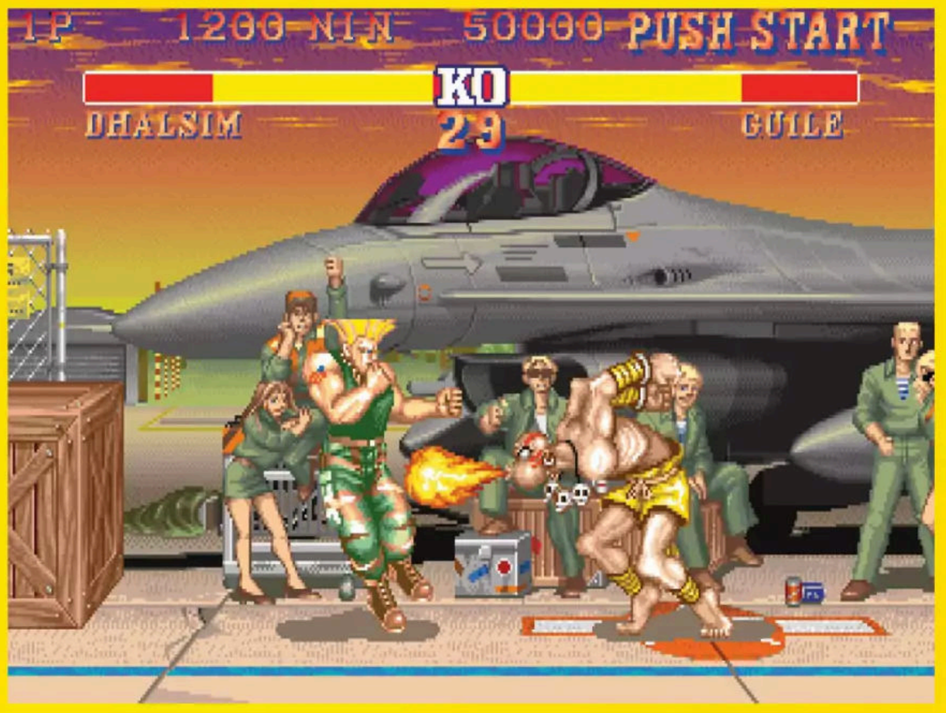
STREET FIGHTER II

Fighting games had come and gone before, but Capcom's 1991 classic was something else. Taking control of one of eight diverse characters, players could challenge another player or the CPU, with four bosses to face in the latter case. The graphics and sound were marvellous, but the secret sauce that made *Street Fighter II* was the accidental invention of the combo. Upon connecting with certain moves, players could immediately hit additional moves before the previous animation had completed – and before the opponent was able to block. The developers decided to keep it, and it's the basis for fighting game combo systems to this day.

Street Fighter II drove a boom period in the early Nineties arcade scene, largely thanks to the fierce one-on-one competition it inspired. Cabinets could be found everywhere, and tournament play soon became a regular occurrence. It also created a fighting game gold rush that saw countless competitors enter the space, which eventually led to a legal precedent on how close an imitator could be when Capcom unsuccessfully sued Data East for infringing its copyright with *Fighter's History*.

"WHEN YOU SWITCH OUT THE CPU FOR A HUMAN OPPONENT ONE THAT CAN LEVEL UP ALONGSIDE YOU AS YOU TRY OUT DIFFERENT CHARACTERS AND STRATEGIES – THAT'S WHEN STREET FIGHTER BECOMES SO MUCH MORE"

MATT EDWARDS, RETRO GAMER 181



SUPER MARIO BROS

■ Originally intended as something of a swan song for the Famicom cartridge format, as Nintendo planned to move over to disks, *Super Mario Bros* packs an incredible amount of game into 32KB. The game set a new standard for the platform genre with smoothly scrolling levels, a variety of different areas and enemies, plenty of secret areas and tight controls. Most platform games crib something or other from it, whether it's breaking blocks or picking up 100 of that game's coin equivalent to earn an extra life.

Though *Super Mario Bros* wasn't Mario's first game, it was the one that made him into a superstar and one of the most recognisable characters in gaming, and set the template for future sequels. It's also one of the most successful games of all time, having sold tens of millions of copies by virtue of being bundled with the NES.

"THE IDEA OF TOUCHING AN ENEMY IN A CERTAIN WAY (FROM ABOVE) CHANGING THE RULES AND INSTEAD KILLING THE ENEMY, WAS QUITE A SUBTLE, CLEVER AND SOPHISTICATED GAME SYSTEM AT THE TIME"

STE PICKFORD RETRO GAMER 203

MEGA DRIVE

■ Sensing that its 8-bit hardware was never going to make much headway against the might of the NES, Sega elected to move to the next generation with an affordable 16-bit system based loosely on its dependable arcade hardware. It was undoubtedly a great console with many fantastic games, but much of the Mega Drive's lasting legacy is tied up in its marketing. Its American adverts were famously aggressive and the UK ones subversive, and *Sonic The Hedgehog* has lasted long past the goal of promoting the console. Its success ultimately gave publishers an alternative to Nintendo, as the likes of Capcom, Ocean and Konami eventually joined early backers such as Electronic Arts and Virgin.

The Mega Drive also serves as a cautionary tale, thanks to its infamous add-ons. The company over-promised and under-delivered with the Mega-CD and the truly disastrous 32X, and lost the trust of players as a consequence. The result is that these kinds of transformative add-ons, which were previously somewhat common, have rarely ever been attempted by other manufacturers since – instead we get upgraded console models such as the PS4 Pro, which simply boost the existing software.

"WE ALWAYS FELT WE WERE BEING OUTGUNNED – NOT OUTCLASSED, BUT OUTGUNNED – BY THE CRAZY SEGA GUYS"

MIKE HAYES RETRO GAMER 205

VIDEOGAME MAGAZINES

■ Not to toot our own horns or anything, but magazines have definitely shaped the videogame landscape over the years. For many years they were the primary way of knowing when a game was coming out, whether or not it was any good and how you could cheat at it. More than that though, their promotion of Japanese consoles created demand that birthed the import market, and a good cover-mounted demo could really boost a game's eventual sales upon release.

DOOM

■ The scenario is simple. Zombies, demons and all sorts of other monsters are everywhere. In the middle of all of this, there is you and a big pile of guns, and there's only one way out of this mess. *Doom* was a brutal, violent game that captured the imaginations of gamers worldwide and catapulted first-person shooters into the limelight, to the point that for a while any game in the genre was simply called a '*Doom* clone'.

Since *Doom* was a very taxing game for the time and was ubiquitous across platforms, the power of your console could be judged by how closely it replicated *Doom*'s PC version. Today, it functions as a kind of 'Hello World' program – if it's got a CPU, someone will run *Doom* on it.

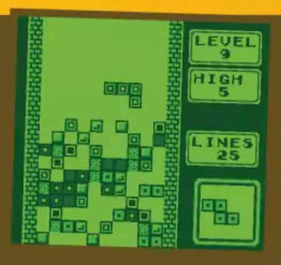
"I REMEMBER ASKING [JOHN] CARMACK, AS IT WAS BEING RELEASED, HOW HE THOUGHT THE GAME TURNED OUT. HE SAID, 'BETTER THAN WE THOUGHT IT COULD'"

TOM HALL, RETRO GAMER 199

RATINGS BOARDS

■ PEGI and ESRB ratings are probably the least exciting thing on any game's box art, but the introduction of age ratings in the Nineties was a big step for gaming. As well as averting more intrusive government regulation of our hobby, it was an active acknowledgement that videogames were not exclusively for children. That gave companies like Nintendo licence to approve violent games like *Mortal Kombat II* without cuts, as well as paving the way for *Resident Evil*, *GTA* and others.

TETRIS



■ We don't use the word addictive lightly, but Alexey Pajitnov's classic wall building puzzle game genuinely is – so much so that it has been the subject of various studies over the years. The '*Tetris* effect' of gameplay affecting your thoughts and dreams is named after it, and the game that sold millions of Game Boys has even been advocated as a treatment for PTSD. Beyond that, it has remained popular for decades and inspired countless imitators within the puzzle genre. ▶

50 THINGS THAT CHANGED GAMING

TOMB RAIDER

Back in 1996, there were very few games that compared to Core Design's pioneering action adventure. It featured a splendid mixture of gameplay elements, with some platform jumping and exploration, frequent combat interludes and a healthy dose of puzzle solving. But what made it so remarkable were the caves and catacombs that formed the setting for your adventure – these were vast, complex 3D spaces on a scale that was really quite unique and you could move about them with total freedom. In an unusual display of flair, you could even show off by performing handstands and swan dives.

Although the game was influential in its own right, Lara Croft as a character is key to the *Tomb Raider* legacy. The aristocratic adventurer quickly became something of a digital celebrity – she appeared on the cover of *The Face*, she was chosen to represent Lucozade in a sponsorship deal, models were hired to portray her and of course there was also a movie. All of this came at a time when games rarely had women as solo protagonists, much less strongly promoted ones, and the success of *Tomb Raider* undoubtedly led developers to take a step back and re-examine conventional character design wisdom.

"WHEN TOBY [GARD] FIRST DESCRIBED WHAT HE ENVISAGED (ON MY FIRST DAY AT CORE) I ACTUALLY WASN'T SURE IT WAS POSSIBLE BECAUSE NOTHING LIKE IT EXISTED"

GAVIN RUMMERY RETRO GAMER 163

3D GRAPHICS

For as long as videogames have existed, developers have wanted to represent 3D space. Some early efforts bore fruit, with isometric perspectives, heavy use of scaling sprites and the Freescape games all being impressive in their own way. However, 3D really took off in the early Nineties as hardware allowed for action games to run at a high speed, and texture mapping increased the visual detail of the graphics. When you compare *Hard Drivin'* from 1989 to *Virtua Racing* in 1992, and then that to *Daytona USA* in 1994, it's clear that the pace of development was incredible. Those arcade advances quickly made their way home, and the arrival of the 32-bit consoles heralded new opportunities for developers and players.

The proliferation of 3D polygonal games ushered in a new era of realism, due to their dynamic perspectives and the way animations could be created. Players could explore spaces that would have been impossible to create on the 16-bit machines, too. But for developers, it wasn't all rosy – skilled 2D artists needed to either adapt or be left behind, and team sizes ballooned. Some companies really struggled to make the transition, such as SNK which failed to migrate from the Neo Geo to the Hyper Neo Geo 64. 2D games were firmly out of fashion for a time too, though thankfully that phase has passed and today developers tend to choose whichever graphical style is most suited to the task.

ELECTRONIC ARTS

Originally founded with the ethos of celebrating the developers that made its hit games, EA eventually became the world's largest third-party publisher, and even today is the second biggest gaming company in the western world. EA was one of the first publishers to really throw its weight around with console manufacturers – its sports games did wonders for the Mega Drive, but its lack of support hurt platforms like the Dreamcast and Wii U. Some of its practices have been controversial, such as withholding its sports games from Xbox Live until Microsoft cancelled its own sports range, and striking an exclusivity deal with the NFL to kill off the rival *NFL 2K* series. It was named America's worst company by readers of *Consumerist* in 2012 and 2013.

Despite this, it has undoubtedly had highlights too. Best known for its annual sports games such as *FIFA* and *Madden*, it has also had a long track record for publishing quality games in other genres, from early hits like *MULE* and *Pinball Construction Set* to *Desert Strike*, *Need For Speed* and *Mirror's Edge*. It was also the first of the modern mega-publishers, absorbing studios such as Bullfrog, Westwood, BioWare and Codemasters over the years.

PLAYSTATION

While you can debate the point at which console gaming went mainstream – or even if it ever really has – we'd mark the PlayStation as the system that got there. Despite being a newcomer to the console market, Sony had a potent piece of hardware and the key third-party support to sweep aside the old order of Sega and Nintendo. The PlayStation represented everything that was cool about gaming, whether that was cutting-edge 3D capabilities, licensed soundtracks in games like *WipEout*, or simply canny marketing that saw systems placed in the Ministry Of Sound. Sony sold over 100 million PlayStations – more than twice the number of Saturn and N64 consoles combined.

The most popular games released on the PlayStation ultimately redefined what players expected from home console games. Blockbuster hits like *Final Fantasy VII*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Resident Evil* advanced a more cinematic style of storytelling, taking advantage of the CD-ROM format for dramatic FMV, full voice acting or both. *Ridge Racer* had been a killer app at launch, but by the end of the generation players took a more critical view of content light arcade conversions, largely thanks to the plentiful tracks and hundreds of cars of *Gran Turismo*. Unlockable content and substantial single-player experiences were no longer optional if you wanted your game to sell millions.

"BEING A HUGE RIDGE RACER FAN (I EVEN HAVE THE ARCADE MACHINE), I WAS BLOWN AWAY THAT IT WAS VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL TO THE ARCADE VERSION, WHICH ONLY APPEARED A YEAR OR SO BEFORE!"

MIKE DAILLY, RETRO GAMER 188

ANALOGUE CONTROLS

Though they had been tried in the past, analogue controls became a necessity as 3D gaming went mainstream. Nintendo was forward thinking in including a thumbstick as standard and Sega recognised the value of analogue triggers, but it's Sony's Dual Shock design that became the overall template most modern pads follow.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

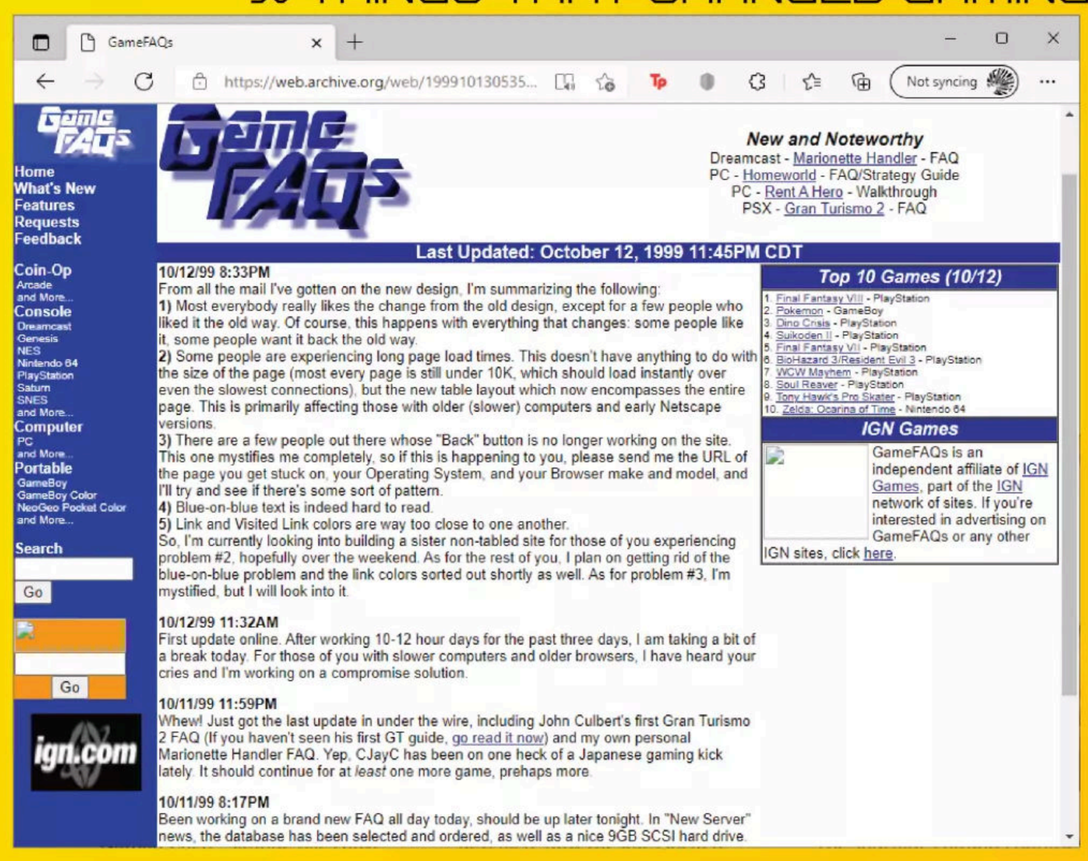
Though computer-controlled enemies have existed ever since *Computer Space*, enemies that respond to player activity are the gold standard. Improvements in AI routines have consistently made for improved gameplay experiences, from the time that players noted individual ghost behaviours in *Pac-Man* to the distinct tactical behaviours of the enemies in *Halo*.

SUPER MARIO 64

■ When it comes to comprehensively demonstrating the benefits of a new console, few games have ever come close to *Super Mario 64*. The 3D visuals were breathtaking, with memorable graphical touches like those rippling paintings, and the controller felt like it was built purely to play the game. Nintendo recognised that trying to replicate the linear assault courses of the 2D games was a fool's errand and delivered carefully crafted 3D worlds, with multiple objectives to ensure you explored them thoroughly. You could beat the game yet still have almost half of it left to see.

When we speak to developers, *Super Mario 64* is one of the games that is most commonly admired. Often this is because of the simple joy of controlling Mario – everything feels natural, from the way he swims to his desperate struggling when running up steep hills, and you can have plenty of fun just by jumping around outside Peach's castle. At a time when the whole industry was adapting to 3D game design, Nintendo seemed to nail the platform genre on the first attempt, and just about every team has learned something from the game.

"DESPITE MANY GAMES CLAIMING THAT PLAYING THEM WAS, 'LIKE CONTROLLING A CARTOON', I THINK THAT WITH THIS GAME IT HAD REALLY AND FINALLY HAPPENED FOR REAL"
MARK R JONES RETRO GAMER 160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New and Noteworthy
Dreamcast - Marionette Handler - FAQ
PC - Homeworld - FAQ/Strategy Guide
PC - Rent A Hero - Walkthrough
PSX - Gran Turismo 2 - FAQ
Last Updated: October 12, 1999 11:45PM CDT
10/12/99 8:33PM
From all the mail I've gotten on the new design, I'm summarizing the following:
1) Most everybody really likes the change from the old design, except for a few people who liked it the old way. Of course, this happens with everything that changes: some people like it, some people want it back the old way.
2) Some people are experiencing long page load times. This doesn't have anything to do with the size of the page (most every page is still under 10K, which should load instantly over even the slowest connections), but the new table layout which now encompasses the entire page. This is primarily affecting those with older (slower) computers and early Netscape versions.
3) There are a few people out there whose "Back" button is no longer working on the site. This one mystifies me completely, so if this is happening to you, please send me the URL of the page you get stuck on, your Operating System, and your Browser make and model, and I'll try and see if there's some sort of pattern.
4) Blue-on-blue text is indeed hard to read.
5) Link and Visited Link colors are way too close to one another.
So, I'm currently looking into building a sister non-tabled site for those of you experiencing problem #2, hopefully over the weekend. As for the rest of you, I plan on getting rid of the blue-on-blue problem and the link colors sorted out shortly as well. As for problem #3, I'm mystified, but I will look into it.
10/12/99 11:32AM
First update online. After working 10-12 hour days for the past three days, I am taking a bit of a break today. For those of you with slower computers and older browsers, I have heard your cries and I'm working on a compromise solution.
10/11/99 11:59PM
Whew! Just got the last update in under the wire, including John Culbert's first Gran Turismo 2 FAQ (If you haven't seen his first GT guide, go read it now) and my own personal Marionette Handler FAQ. Yep, CJayC has been on one heck of a Japanese gaming kick lately. It should continue for at least one more game, prehaps more.
10/11/99 8:17PM
Been working on a brand new FAQ all day today, should be up later tonight. In "New Server" news, the database has been selected and ordered, as well as a nice 9GB SCSI hard drive.
Top 10 Games (10/12)
1. Final Fantasy VIII - PlayStation
2. Pokemon - GameBoy
3. Dino Crisis - PlayStation
4. Suikoden II - PlayStation
5. Final Fantasy VII - PlayStation
6. BioHazard 3/Resident Evil 3 - PlayStation
7. WCW Mayhem - PlayStation
8. Soul Reaver - PlayStation
9. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater - PlayStation
10. Zelda: Ocarina of Time - Nintendo 64
IGN Games
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INTERNET

■ The internet has revolutionised our lives in practically every respect, and videogames are no exception. That starts with the way we play them – often we'll download them rather than going to a shop to buy them, while bugs are rarely the ruinous issue they were in the past due to the ease of distributing patches. Expansions are much more common in the console space thanks to downloadable content, and the internet even lets you play games with your friends, without the downside of having to invite them in to drink all your beer.

The culture around gaming has changed too. No longer do you have to wait a month for precious new screenshots of an upcoming game – these days you'll get full gameplay trailers on GamesRadar. If you're struggling with your latest purchase, Google and GameFAQs ensure that you don't have to go out and buy a strategy guide. If you're truly stuck, you might just choose to watch someone else play the game on YouTube, and if you're really good then you could well show that off by speedrunning a game live on Twitch.

It's also much easier for a gamer to make their opinion heard. Often that just means that fanboy nonsense has migrated from the playground to Twitter, but a big backlash can cause developers to alter their courses of action – just look at the ending to *Mass Effect 3*. Indeed, developers and journalists being accessible to players can be a good thing, but it has also allowed for major harassment campaigns. However you feel about these changes, it's certain that gaming will never be the same as it was before widespread internet access.

SONY

■ As well as producing series like *Gran Turismo*, *God Of War* and *Uncharted* from its internal studios, Sony is the most consistently successful manufacturer of home consoles. When Sony takes a stance against something, be it 2D graphics in the past or sexual content today, console developers cannot ignore it.

3DFX

■ 3D accelerator cards were a transformative addition to PCs of the Nineties, and 3DFX was at the forefront of that revolution. The company has been dissolved and its Voodoo cards and Glide API long since surpassed, but it paved the path that the likes of Nvidia and AMD walk today.

CD-ROM

■ Game developers could let their ambitions run wild in the Nineties thanks to this capacious storage medium. High-quality soundtracks, full voice acting and rich video content could be included in games for the first time – and if one disc was filled, they were cheap enough that adding another was fine.

E3

■ The games industry created its own major conference in 1995, and it has often been a focal point of the gaming calendar. A good or bad showing can really shape public perceptions – and there's a disastrous "giant enemy crab" moment for every time Miyamoto shows up with the Master Sword. ▶

PLAYSTATION 2

■ Sony's second console is still the best-selling games console of all time. That on its own wouldn't qualify it for inclusion on this list, but what does is how it got there. Part of it was the massive pre-launch anticipation, and another part was undoubtedly the great games that it hosts, but plenty of people bought one just because it represented a reasonable way to watch *The Matrix*. The PS2's inclusion of DVD movie playback as standard was a major selling point over its rivals, and its success proved that there was strong demand for non-gaming features in games consoles. Providing a great gaming experience was no longer enough – console manufacturers now had to produce a box that could service all of your screen-time needs.

For Sony, the hope that lightning would strike again influenced its release of the PSX, a Japan-only PS2 with digital video recording capability, as well as the PSP's sophisticated multimedia functions.

The next generation was clearly influenced by the PS2's success too – Microsoft dabbled with HD-DVD and Sony integrated a Blu-Ray drive in the PS3. But by the end of the generation online streaming was the hot ticket and consoles could be used for Netflix, Spotify and more. Even Nintendo allowed the BBC iPlayer on the Wii. Today's consoles still have all of those apps as well as 4K Blu-Ray disc support, and it's the PS2 that started us down this path.

"PS2 REALLY WAS THE GOLDILOCKS CONSOLE – NOT TOO MUCH TO HANDLE AND A GOOD RETURN FOR THE TIME INVESTED IN IT. I THINK THAT HAD A LOT TO DO WITH IT BECOMING THE MOST SUCCESSFUL CONSOLE OF ALL TIME"

MARK CERNY, RETRO GAMER 216

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

■ Have you ever wanted to be utterly reprehensible? That's the experience the *Grand Theft Auto* series offers – you can indulge in your worst fantasies, from committing armed robberies to assaulting random pedestrians. The third game in the series combined that freedom with an impressive open 3D world, and turned a previously popular series into a world conquering phenomenon. This was where the series really started to find its voice – quite literally in fact, as this was the first appearance of the excellent radio stations that allowed players a closer look at the warped world of Liberty City.

Of course, there's an open-world heritage here that goes back through the likes of *Driver* and *Shenmue*, all the way back to 2D games like *Turbo Esprit*. But it was Rockstar that put it all together to enormous success and not only provided a template for *Grand Theft Auto*'s future success, but a formula for plenty of imitators to follow. Initially these were obvious pretenders like *True Crime: Streets Of LA* and the original *Saints Row*, but over time we began to see more thematic variation in open world games like *Assassin's Creed*, *Red Dead Redemption* and of course *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild*. Linear games will never go away, but 3D open worlds are good tools for game designers to have.

"I THINK EVERYONE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL. YOU COULDN'T PLAY IT WITHOUT LAUGHING OUT LOUD. IN HINDSIGHT, I SHOULD PROBABLY HAVE BOUGHT SHARES IN ROCKSTAR"

ALAN CAMPBELL, RETRO GAMER 122

RENDERWARE

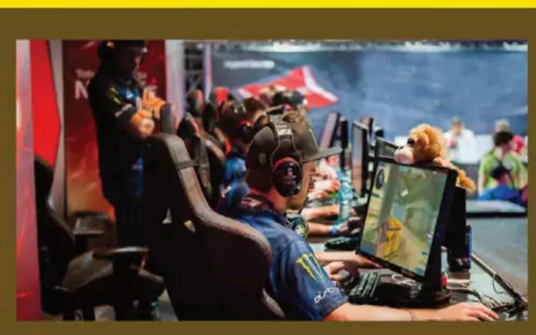
■ Criterion's middleware was a revelation, enabling easier porting between PS2, Xbox, GameCube and PC. Renderware powered hundreds of games during that generation, and while it declined in importance when new consoles arrived, it can be seen as a forerunner to the likes of the modern Unreal Engine and Unity.

XBOX LIVE

■ While it wasn't the first online console gaming service, Xbox Live set the standard for everything that followed. Microsoft's service gave players a username and friends list, plus voice chat and stable servers – in exchange for a subscription fee. Xbox Live Arcade also popularised downloadable console games.

STEAM

■ What started as a patch delivery system has evolved into a great service, unifying digital game retail, online gaming functions and more. Its convenience and frequent discounts have shifted the PC gaming market away from physical games, and made Valve powerful due to its massive market share.



ESPORTS

■ Competitive gaming has been around for decades, but was turbo charged in the 21st century. Going pro in games like *League Of Legends* and *Fortnite* is a viable career option thanks to global tournaments with huge prize pools and tournament streams watched by millions can make stars of top competitors.

MINECRAFT

■ Give a kid a Lego set and they'll be occupied for a long time – they're just naturally creative like that. Give them *Minecraft*, and the worlds they can build for themselves are limitless. The open-ended design allows players plenty of creative freedom that makes it the perfect game for the era of user-generated content. As well as allowing players to flex their imaginations, it has plenty of interesting systems that have allowed players to construct impressive machines including genuine working virtual hard discs.

Minecraft is a game that has spread far beyond its simple premise, with plenty of its own lore and that encompasses spin-offs like *Minecraft: Story Mode* and tie-in books. Its culture is so established that the dedicated unofficial magazine *Minecraft World* has been running for over 80 issues, and it's still a popular game with streamers. But what really makes it special is that it is emblematic of the success that indie games can have in the modern era – while it's owned by Microsoft today, this game that has sold a whopping 238 million copies was initially the work of just one person. It's also an example that selling an openly unfinished game is now the norm, setting the trend for Early Access games.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

■ For as long as people have been playing games, they've wanted to play them together, distance be damned – that's why we have *MUDs*, *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, *Phantasy Star Online* and more. Then *World Of Warcraft* came along. Using the fantasy lore of its well respected strategy series as a setting for its MMORPG, Blizzard created a monster hit that quickly exceeded all of its predecessors, thanks to excellent pacing and high-quality visuals.

World Of Warcraft took the concept of paying a monthly subscription for a single game into the mainstream, with a peak subscriber base of 12 million players. The game has created its own culture, spawning memes like Leeroy Jenkins and memorable incidents like the Corrupted Blood plague. It has also become a part of wider pop culture in a way that its predecessors never did – *EverQuest* was the subject of jokes in web comics, while *South Park* devoted a whole episode to *World Of Warcraft*.

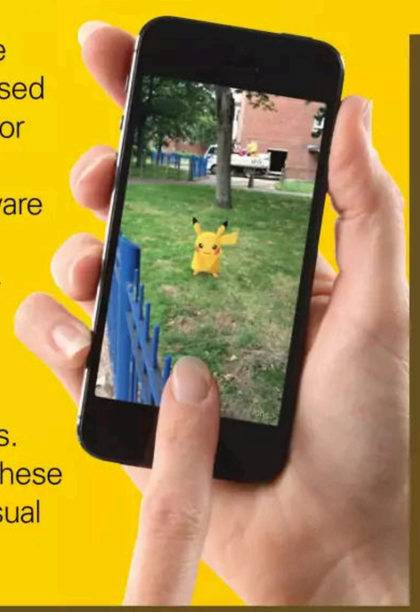
"WE THOUGHT MAYBE PEOPLE WOULD GET ON AND PLAY FOR ONE TO TWO HOURS A NIGHT BUT PEOPLE WERE PLAYING FOR FOUR TO SIX HOURS EVERY NIGHT AND THE SAME PEOPLE WERE PLAYING EVERY SINGLE NIGHT."

KEVIN BEARDSLEE, RETRO GAMER 200

APPLE

■ Despite the fact that it hasn't positioned itself as a gaming company, Apple's machines have proven to be pivotal at a couple of points in gaming history. The first was during the era of the Apple II series, the company's home computer line that was launched in 1977 and had a huge impact in the USA. A generation of aspiring programmers took their first steps on an Apple II of some kind, and these were the computers that saw the first published games by the likes of John Romero, Jordan Mechner and Mark Turmell.

Apple returned to prominence in the gaming space with the introduction of the iPhone, which revolutionised smartphones. Although it wasn't primarily designed for gaming, owners were receptive to them and Apple eventually started using more gaming-focused hardware and even launched the Apple Arcade service. The market for mobile games is so enormous that home-grown successes like *Clash Of Clans* are competing with console interlopers like *Pokémon Go*, and the microtransaction heavy business model commonly associated with them has migrated to other platforms. With a smartphone in seemingly everyone's pocket these days, mobile games aren't going anywhere – and casual gamers may never buy dedicated consoles again.



WII

■ For three generations following the NES, Nintendo followed a very simple home console formula – make a more powerful machine than the last one, make some weird decisions, watch it sell less than the last machine. Confronted with the very real possibility of declining into irrelevance, and faced with competitors with significantly greater financial resources, it took a gamble and aimed for the family market. The Wii's controller was familiar in form factor and easy to operate thanks to its motion sensors, and *Wii Sports* was the ultimate proof of concept. All you had to do was mimic the real motions, so it was a game that anyone of any age could understand. The Wii became Nintendo's best-selling home console ever, reversing years of decline in that business sector.

While motion controls had been popular before, most notably with Sony's EyeToy, Nintendo's success with the Wii ensured that everyone else took notice. Sony introduced the PlayStation Move controller for PS3, which was very similar to the Wii controller, while Microsoft launched the Xbox 360 Kinect camera to such success that it initially made it a core part of the Xbox One system. It also introduced the Mii copycat Avatars. Motion controls aren't as hot as they once were, and have been the subject of derision from core gamers at times, but don't expect them to go away. Both Sony and Nintendo still include motion functions in their standard controllers, and they're also still a key part of mobile gaming. Beyond that, motion controllers are crucial to the immersion of VR games, which may be the main reason that they continue to evolve in the future.

ACHIEVEMENTS

■ The ultimate evolution of the high score table, Achievements (or Trophies, if you prefer) measure your gaming prowess. They're part of the furniture today but they've definitely altered our gaming habits, with some games sought after just for their easy achievements or very difficult 100% requirements.

VIRTUAL REALITY

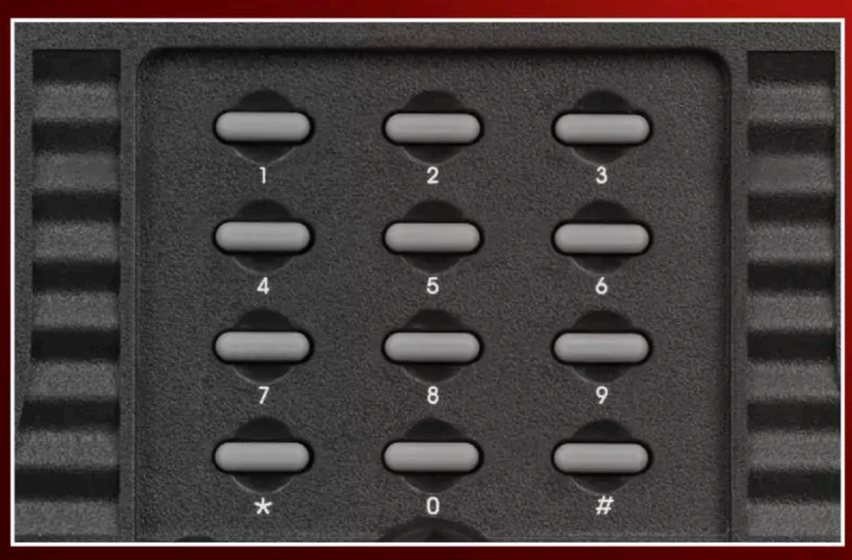
■ After years of false starts, the Oculus Rift headset finally made home virtual reality viable and created a market that the likes of HTC, Sony and Valve have since joined. The technology has added an unparalleled sense of visual immersion to games like *Resident Evil VII* and *Half-Life: Alyx*.

Pro Controller

» **PLATFORM:** Jaguar » **RELEASED:** 1995
» **COST:** $29.99 (launch), £80+ (today, boxed) £60+ (today, unboxed

Given the reputation of the Atari Jaguar's standard controller, it seems almost perverse that someone looked at it and decided that the best way to improve it was to add more buttons. Yet that's exactly what the Pro Controller did, doubling the number of main face buttons to six and adding two shoulder buttons too. Although the general shape of the Pro Controller remained broadly similar to that of the original, there were some changes to the ergonomics that improved over the previous design. The round face buttons have more depth and spring to them than before, and the updated d-pad is more comfortable over long play sessions.

Due to the late release of the Pro Controller, relatively few games were designed specifically to take advantage of it – only *Battlemorph*, *Fight For Life* and *NBA Jam Tournament Edition* advertise compatibility on their boxes. However, rather than having unique functions the new buttons simply replicated the inputs of certain numbers on the numerical keypad, in a more convenient location. As a result all Jaguar games are compatible with the Pro Controller. Unfortunately the Pro Controller is far less common than the standard controller, though enterprising fans now manufacture unofficial versions of it. *



SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Pro Controller fact

■ You can easily tell aftermarket reproductions of the Pro Controller from the originals. The official ones carry the Atari logo at the top of the controller, and the newly manufactured versions don't.

ESSENTIAL GAME

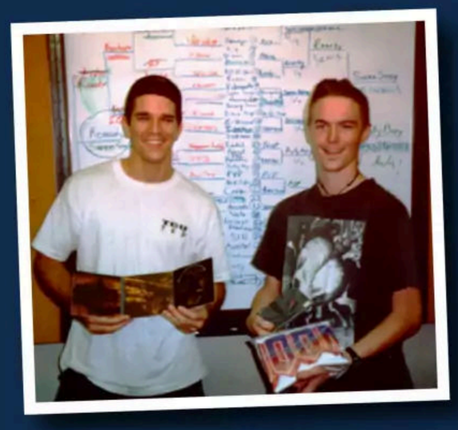
Primal Rage

The sort of person that would own a Pro Controller seems like the kind of person who would have everything, so if we're going down that route we may as well make this a Jaguar CD game, since it's the console's best fighter. *Primal Rage* was one of the few games designed specifically to use the Pro Controller, although you do have to switch the game to the six-button control method in the options screen. Once you do, you'll have access to all strengths of high and low attacks, making the game far more enjoyable than on the standard pad.

THE STORY OF QUAKECON

A LAN PARTY HELD 25 YEARS AGO AT A LA QUINTA HOTEL IN GARLAND, TEXAS, ORGANISED BY FANS OF ID SOFTWARE HAS MUTATED INTO ONE OF THE BIGGEST, BOLDEST AND BLOODIEST GAMER GATHERINGS IN GAMING HISTORY

WORDS BY DANNY GALLAGHER



» Remedy (left) and Bullyboy (right) won the first *Quake* tournament at the first QuakeCon held in 1996 in Garland, Texas.

» iD Founder John Romero competes in a *Quake* deathmatch during the first QuakeCon in 1996.

» iD Software founder John Carmack and his famed Ferrari Testarossa made an impressive entrance at the first QuakeCon in 1996.

» A volunteer puts up the official banner for the 1997 QuakeCon at a Holiday Inn hotel in Plano, Texas.

The first QuakeCon held in 1996 looks nothing like the last in-person QuakeCon held in 2019. The first gathering happened in the conference room of a 1,250 square foot La Quinta Inn in Garland, Texas, with around 40 attendees. The most recent, in-person QuakeCon happened at the 490,000 square foot Gaylord Texan Resort & Conference Center in Grapevine, Texas with more than 10,000 attendees. "The first one felt much more like a get-together," says David 'Wino' Miller who attended and helped organise the first QuakeCon in 1996. "I don't think anyone would've thought QuakeCon would've gotten as big as it is."

The only thing that hasn't changed about QuakeCon is its dedication to the fans. Attendees have flown in from well out of town for the last 25 years just to be the first to see and play the newest games from studios that released classics like *Doom*, *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Quake*. It's also become a community meet-up where people can hang out with the friends they frag in multiplayer matches and even chat with the people who make their favourite games.

"I GUESS IT'S KIND OF THE SAME THING AS GOING TO A MEET AND GREET FOR YOUR FAVOURITE BAND"

"I guess it's kind of the same thing as going to a meet and greet for your favourite band," says Logan Tremblay who's been going to QuakeCon every year with his wife Caitlyn since they started dating in 2008. "You play these games. They're a big part of your life, especially if you play games like I do, and getting to meet the people who create those things is a really introspective look into the work and process, which is an absurd amount of work even for very simple games."

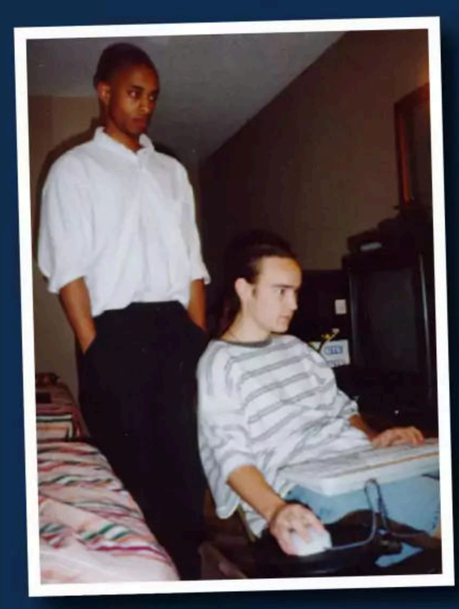
QuakeCon started in the late-Nineties when public use of the Internet was in its infancy. Games like *Doom* sparked chatter in chat platforms like the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) that had dedicated rooms to iD Software and its games. David moderated the #quake channel as news of the highly anticipated first-person shooter started to create a palpable fever pitch for its release. Sometimes, some of iD's famous developers and designers like John Romero and Christian Antkow known online as 'Disruptor' would pop into the IRC channel to converse with players. "It blew people's minds," David says. "Somehow it got out that the developers hung out in that channel and it blew up from 100 to around 1,000 people just waiting to hear a developer jump in and say something about the game." As fans started to learn more about the Gothic, nail-spitting shooter and the *Quake* release date grew closer, chatter started about putting together local area network (LAN) parties so they could shoot each other with nail guns and rockets instead of just violent NPC enemies.

"Someone floated the idea and thought wouldn't it be neat if we could play the game in person," says Brian 'Wendigo' Hess who attended the first ten QuakeCons. "Everyone connected over dial-up and there wasn't enough bandwidth to play with a lot of players. Everyone was excited to meet the people they were chatting with on the channel."

Members started to scout possible locations in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that could handle a small crowd and be close enough to the iD Software headquarters in Mesquite, Texas, so the game's developers could make a visit. "I remember calling around a couple of hotels to figure out how they could accommodate us," David says. "I didn't think a lot of the hotels knew what we were asking for and what kind of power issues we needed."

The first gathering didn't have exhibitors or even sponsors. It was just 40 people playing the new *Quake* and other iD classics on their computers mixed with some one-on-one and free-for-all matches. The only prizes were bragging rights. David says the entire thing ran on a network that could barely handle the power. "It was very laid back," he tells us. "The network was not a sophisticated network. Before ethernet became the standard, we had a different one called BNC. The problem with that network is when one person disconnects from it, the

» QuakeCon attendees consume massive amounts of Bawls energy drinks leading to massive structures made out of cans throughout the venue.



» The attendees of the first QuakeCon in 1996 took the LAN party back to their rooms.

» Guests check in for the 1997 QuakeCon at a Holiday Inn in Plano, Texas. Volunteers still help run the event.

whole thing goes down. Games would stop. Tournaments would die. That happened a couple of times during the event."

Some of iD's most famous names like John Carmack and John Cash expressed interest in attending including John Romero who left iD shortly after *Quake*'s completion but still wanted to meet and play with fans. David says they didn't even know they would be there until Ferraris started pulling into the hotel parking lot.

"It's not a competitive event," says John Romero who now runs Romero Games in Galway, Ireland, with his wife Brenda. "It's a convention with a LAN party happening in it and other cool things. It's a community of people. Everybody knew everybody. Everybody knew everybody's nicknames. It was like a release party that we were having a LAN party at."

The competition could be fierce as players quickly learned the nuances and strategies of *Quake*, some of which the developers didn't realise until they saw them in action at the first QuakeCon. "Nobody ever played anything like that before so it was pretty special," Brian says. "It was pretty raucous. That game is quite intense especially if you're intent on winning."

QuakeCon continued the following year and just got bigger with each new event. The attendance was more than five times bigger than the first gathering by 1997 when the con moved to a Holiday Inn in Plano, Texas. QuakeCon not only needed a bigger space but it also needed a bigger network that could handle a massive 'bring your own computer' (BYOC) event. Some people from iD offered to help by bringing in technicians who set up power grids for concerts to provide the con and the hotel the power it needed to stay wired.

"They [the Holiday Inn] did not understand we were going to be overloading their power," David says with a laugh. "We had close to 500 ▶

» It's 1998 and a large number of gamers are busy competing in a *Quake II* tournament.

» A long line of eager attendees wait to check into the 1998 QuakeCon in Dallas, Texas.

KEY QUAKECON MOMENTS

THE UPS AND DOWNS THAT SHAPED QUAKECON

THE FIRST QUAKECON • 1996

■ Computers didn't have the capability to stage multiplayer battles in games like *Quake* when it was released in 1996. So a group of 40 iD Software fans from across America organised a LAN (Local Area Network) party at a La Quinta Inn in Garland, Texas, that they dubbed 'QuakeCon'.

CPL SETS UP THE FIRST QUAKECON PRO TOURNEY • 1998

■ QuakeCon doubled in size as its word of mouth spread across the growing Internet. So did the cash prize pool for *Quake* tournaments thanks to the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) making it one of the first and most lucrative pro-esports tournaments in the industry.

ID SOFTWARE MAKES QUAKECON OFFICIAL • 1999

■ The fans could only carry so much of the planning for the growing game gathering. That's when iD Software decided to step in and help organise and secure financing for the third QuakeCon that attracted over 2,000 people. The studio has helmed the annual event ever since for its fans.

QUAKECON BECOMES THE WORLD'S LARGEST LAN PARTY • 2007

■ The annual, free game convention becomes so big that it moves to the massive Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas. The crowd of 7,000 took up 70,000 square feet of hotel space helping QuakeCon earn a Guinness World Record for the largest free LAN party in the word.

THE FOURTH DOOM IS FINALLY REVEALED • 2014

■ The long-awaited release of the *Doom* next-gen reboot went through seven years of gruelling development but iD, now owned by ZeniMax, saved its first gameplay demo just for its rabid, raucous fans who attended QuakeCon. The game simply titled *Doom* would finally get a release two years later.

EVENTFUL ALTERNATIVES

CAN'T GO TO QUAKECON? TRY THESE INSTEAD

EVOLUTION CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

Since 1996, this series has brought some of the world's greatest virtual fighters to Japan for a high-stakes tournament that focuses exclusively on fighting games. The gathering features showdowns in games from series like *Street Fighter*, *Tekken* and *Mortal Kombat* as players fight for a prize pool of $125,000.

DREAMHACK

Just about every videogame from almost every era on consoles, PCs and mobile devices are featured at this massive tournament gathering. It started in 1994 as a small, friendly gathering in Malung, Sweden. It has expanded to multiple events in five countries throughout the year.

BLIZZCON

Blizzard Entertainment, the publisher behind storied hits like *Warcraft*, *StarCraft*, *Diablo* and *Hearthstone*, has hosted its own game gathering and tournament since 2005 in Irvine, California thanks to the massive fanbase built by its signature MMORPG *World Of Warcraft*.

PAX

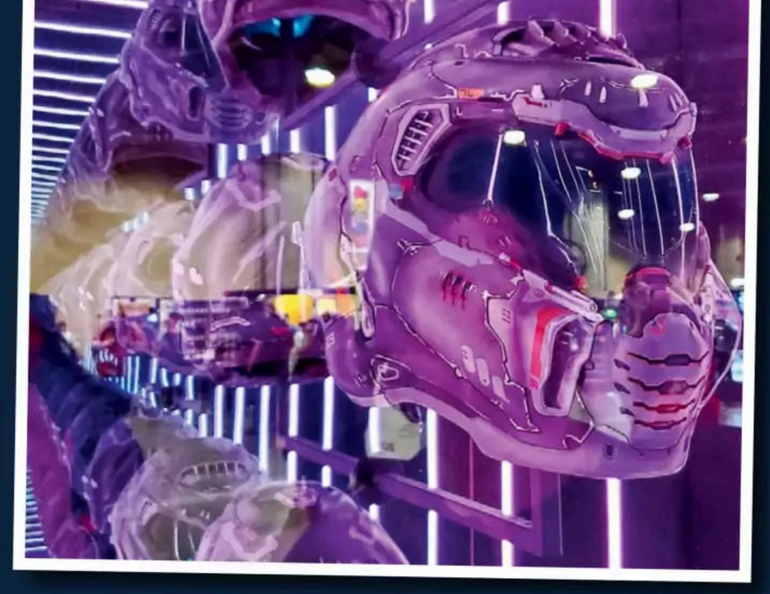
Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik, the authors of the popular webcomic *Penny Arcade*, launched their own gaming expo in 2004 to celebrate games and gaming culture. It has expanded to places like Boston, Massachusetts, San Antonio, Texas and Melbourne, Australia as well as a tabletop gaming gathering and a developer convention.

GAMESCOM

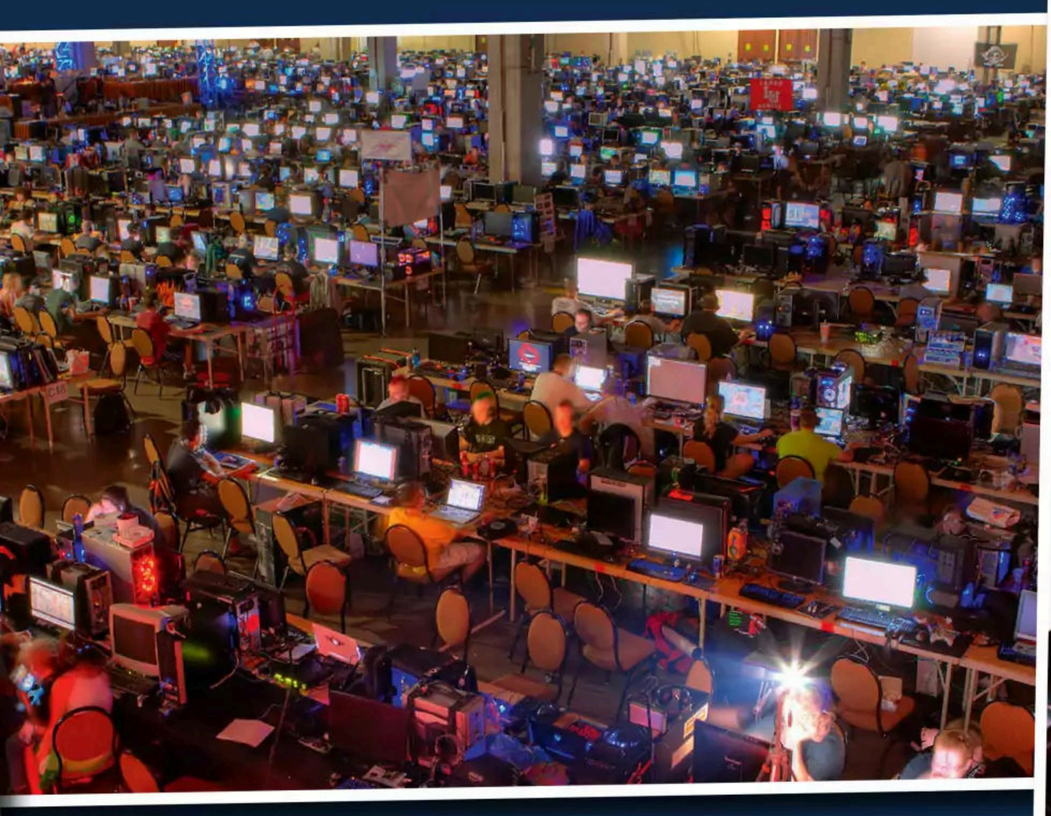
This annual game expo held in Germany since 2002 is a trade event but it's also partly morphed into a con that's driven by fan involvement, discussion and enthusiasm. It attracts crowds that reach well over 200,000 as well as some of the most sought after game studios and franchises.

» The prizes for tournaments at QuakeCon increased from year to year as iD Software found more sponsors for the event.

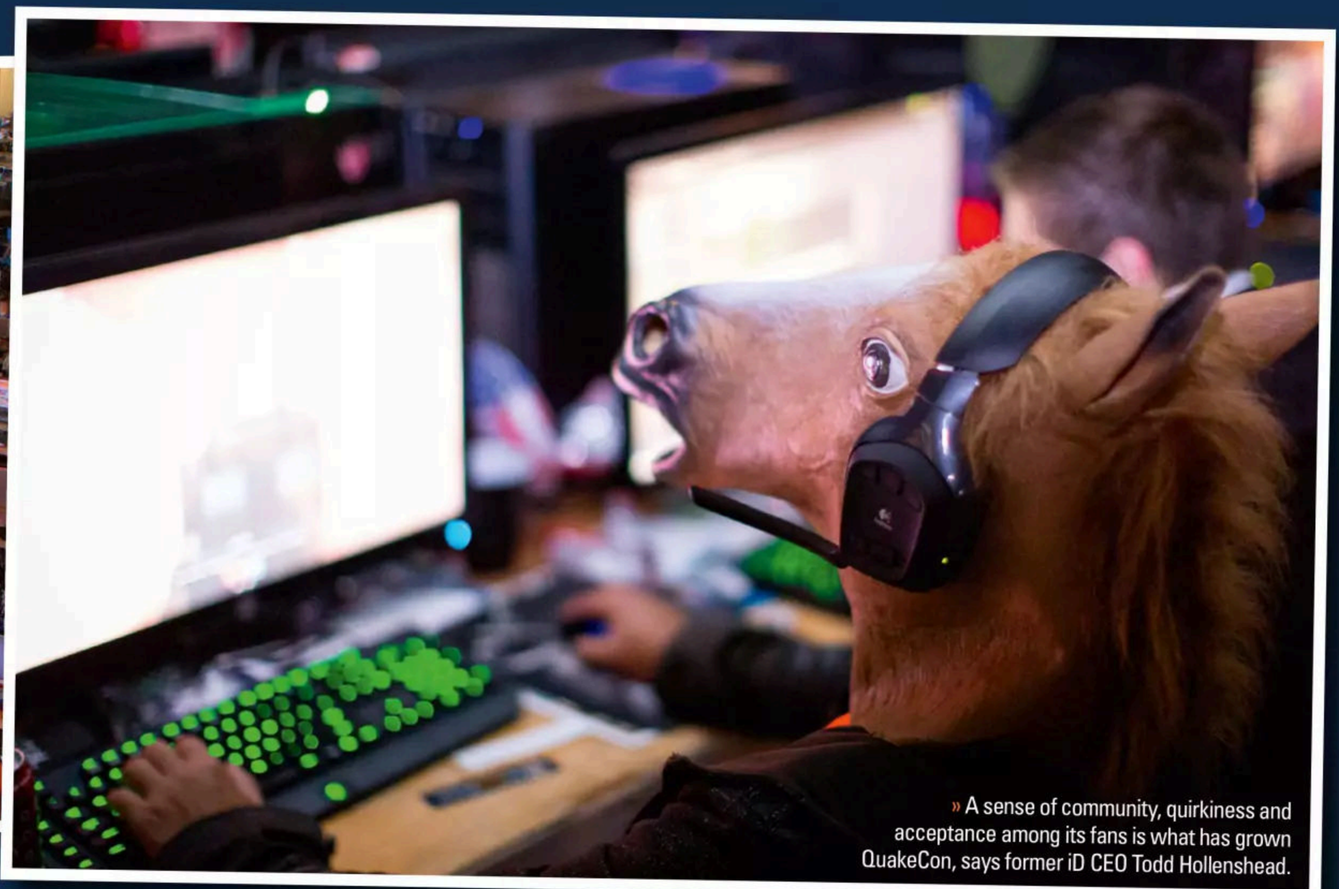
» Attendees of QuakeCon build insane case mod creations like this see-through skull case for the con's annual case mod contest.



» The 2019 QuakeCon was known as the 'Year Of *Doom*' in honour of the game's 25th anniversary.



» The attendance for QuakeCon has grown into the tens of thousands over the last 25 years.



» A sense of community, quirkiness and acceptance among its fans is what has grown QuakeCon, says former iD CEO Todd Hollenshead.

people for the second QuakeCon. We ended up blowing their power as soon as it got half full and people started flipping on their computers."

The prize money for *Quake*, *Quake II* and *Quake III Arena* tournaments also started to grow. It started in 1998 when the Cyberathlete Professional League, one of the first professional esports leagues founded by Angel Munoz, joined up with QuakeCon as the attendance started to reach into the thousands. iD Software made its involvement official with corporate sponsors and expansions that continued to grow QuakeCon as it continued through the Noughties and planning changed hands from the fans to the game company. "They needed some kind of corporate sponsorship as opposed to Intel just sponsoring for prizes," says Monte Fontenot, the CPL's director of events. "That was the time when iD realised it was a celebration of their products. So that's when they started to support QuakeCon and provide more of a secure, stable setup."

Even though QuakeCon started to grow into what seemed like gaming trade shows and conventions with exhibitor booths and developer presentations, they kept it free and open to all of their fans and made sure it never lost its sense of fun that helped spark its creation. "We wanted to have the emphasis on fun as opposed to a business conference," says Todd Hollenshead, the former CEO of iD Software who left in 2013 to become head of publishing at Saber Interactive. "There's E3 or wherever where people show up in suits. For us, it's all about fun around the games. Most of the fun centred around just doing the game. Having the crowd get together in a festival atmosphere around the games, that was the whole point."

Even as QuakeCon attracts crowds into the tens of thousands and scores sponsorships that spend untold amounts of money, it still hasn't lost its sense of community and belonging. Long-lasting friendships are made and solidified there. Todd said he knows of some relationships that started with a trip to the BYOC room and turned into something more serious as fans would go back year after year.

"For me, a lot of it was the community aspect," says Caitlyn Tremblay. "You go and see some of the same people who you made friends with at QuakeCon. Everybody's always been super friendly, especially earlier on. It's fun because you see the same people over and over again and run into them. It's a controlled level of chaos, which is always one of my favourite aspects."

Developers would still meet and play with players in the BYOC pit even as QuakeCon grew into a massive affair. "One thing that I'd try to do every year was get in and take some time and play in the BYOC with the fans, not just being up on stage and presenting this or talking about whatever we're doing in the future," Todd continues. "I'd just get in and mingle with the people and watch them play. It was always fun to see that from a gratifying standpoint but it's amazing to see how good the pros were or watching a video of a rocket jump technique they learned or they'd have a water cooler in their PC to cool off their graphics card."

> "HAVING THE CROWD GET TOGETHER IN A FESTIVAL ATMOSPHERE AROUND THE GAMES, THAT WAS THE POINT"
> TODD HOLLENSHEAD

QuakeCon still hasn't lost its sense of fun around the culture of gaming that exists outside of the games. Every year, QuakeCon holds contests for the best custom case mod and the dirtiest keyboard competition that were started by the fans. Large amounts of Bawls energy drinks are consumed and fans will hold chugging contests and build massive structures in the halls of the venue out of the aluminium cans, which Caitlyn calls, "The most gamery gamer thing I've ever heard of in my life."

» The 'bring your own computer' pit is the epicentre of QuakeCon as gamers play the latest iD and Bethesda games.

"A lot of those were just thought up by the fans because with BYOC being the core of the event, the case mod contest and the dirtiest keyboard are the polar ends of who has the most badass machine and who schlepped in the worst doorstop," Todd says. "One year, someone had everyone sign their car entirely in pen."

Unfortunately, the coronavirus outbreak prevented QuakeCon from reaching its 25th consecutive milestone and Bethesda decided to cancel the event for the first time since its inception. The following year, QuakeCon returned in an entirely digital forum. "Everyone was super bummed out that they couldn't continue the streak during COVID," David says. "Early on, they saw the writing on the wall. There's just so much prep they'd have to do for something this big and rightfully so, they would've had problems. I felt bad for them too, even not having gone for so many years."

If there's one thing that can help bring QuakeCon back next year in 2022, it's the fans who've helped build it. "It has a following and fanbase that isn't tied to iD or *Fallout*," Monte explains. "This is a culture of people who want it to be an event. They've chosen QuakeCon. That's their event."

Image Credits: Caitlyn Tremblay, Brian 'Wendigo' Hess/Hesslabs.com, Arthur Mullen/Dondeq2.com, Ed Steele/EdSteelePhotography.com

THE HISTORY OF Rez

» Tetsuya Mizuguchi, *Rez* producer and founder of United Game Artists (UGA), which brought the Sega arcade developer to home consoles.

Twenty years ago, Rez carved out its own unique space in the music game genre, eschewing rhythm, dextrous skill or simulation in favour of a transcendental experience on another plane. Creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi charts the continuously evolving journey of synaesthesia

WORDS BY ALAN WEN

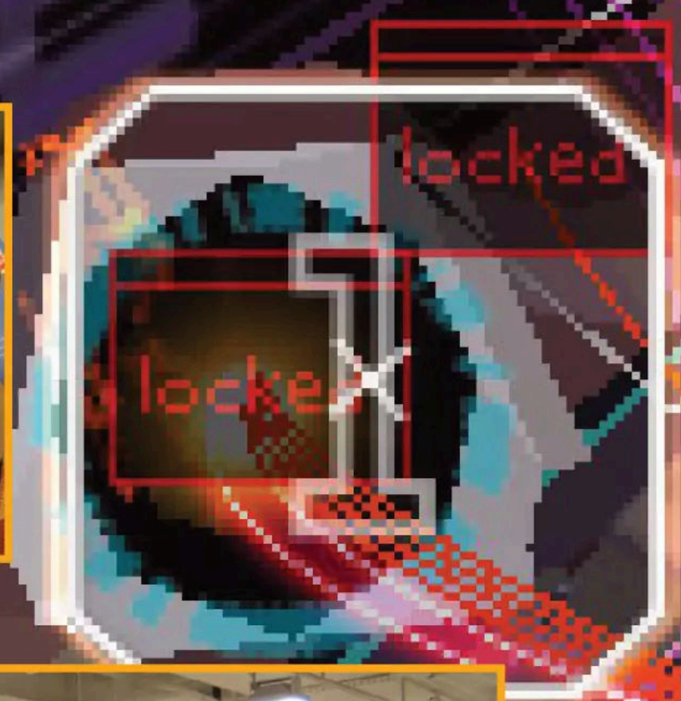
The Dreamcast may have been Sega's swan song in the console business, but in going down swinging it also led to some of the most original and innovative titles in its history.

That go-for-broke mentality gave the opportunity to create new experiences and genres that might attract a new audience instead of just the hardcore gamer. It was for this reason that producer Tetsuya Mizuguchi, already an arcade legend due to the *Sega Rally* series, moved to the console side to do something different under his new Shibuya-based division (away from Sega's then headquarters in Haneda), first simply known as AM9 but later it became its own subsidiary called United Game Artists (UGA). The studios focus was no longer on racing games or even another genre but rather an idea that would become Mizuguchi's life's work.

At first glance, UGA's specialty was in music games, its first game *Space Channel 5* was specifically designed to appeal to a casual female audience, but it ultimately wasn't looking to emulate the emerging rhythm action games made popular with *PaRappa The Rapper* and Konami's Bemani arcade titles. Set inside a virus-ridden cyberspace, *Rez* can also be called a musical game, or by just breaking it down to its basic gameplay fundamentals, it's a rail shooter in the style of *Panzer Dragoon* where you lock-on to shoot down multiple targets. It's typical for game developers to begin with core game mechanics and then build the other elements around it, but when we ask about the origins of *Rez*, Mizuguchi replies, "To tell the truth, we didn't start from analysing other shooting game mechanics. We started from the music, and the fundamental architecture of humans."

In fact, *Rez* isn't really about music or shooting, but combines the two to simulate the phenomenon

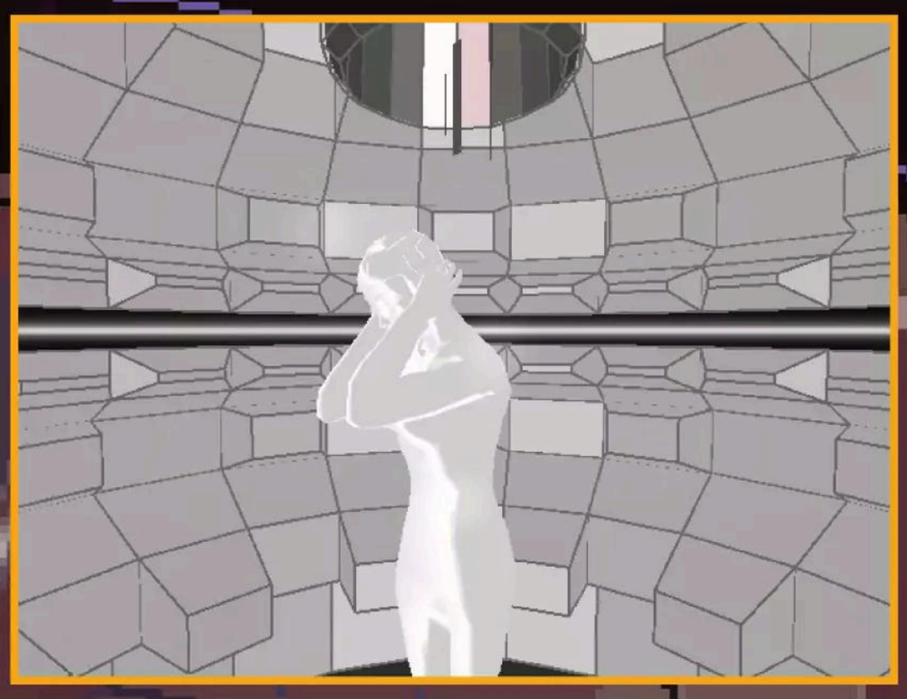
» Jake Kazdal, pictured as a fresh-faced artist for *Rez* in 2001, is currently CEO of Kyoto-based studio 17-Bit.



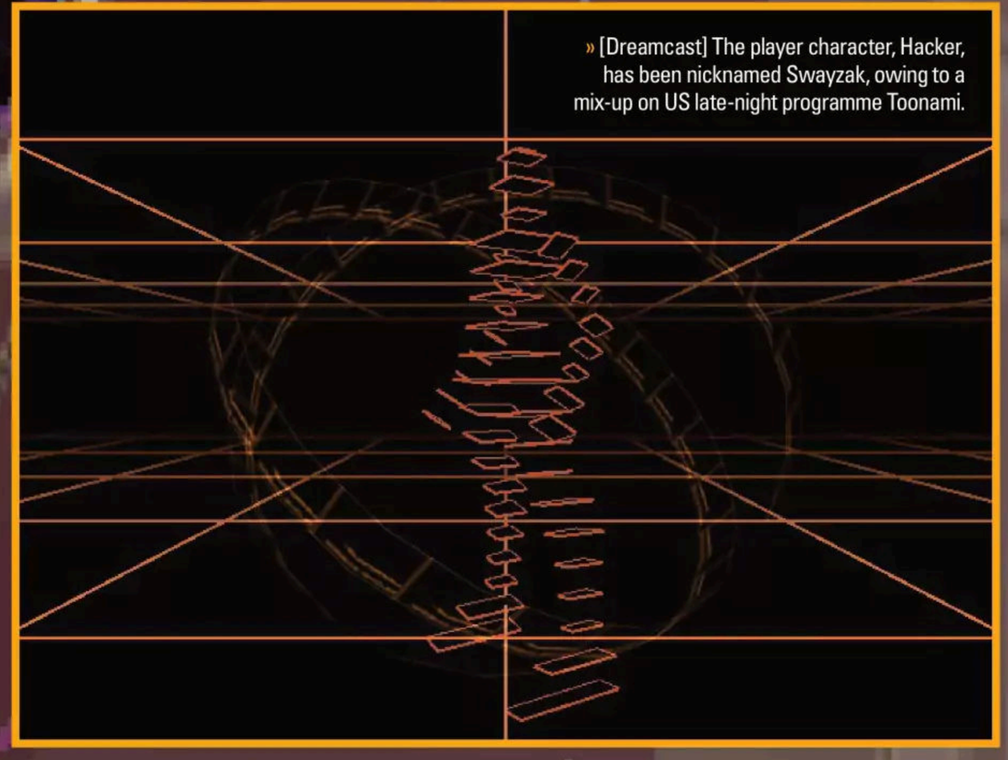
» Jake Kazdal with *Rez* art director Katsumi Yokota at the game's launch in Tokyo.

» [Dreamcast] Collect enough blue nodes and your character's form evolves, including something like a transcendental monk.

> "I wasn't familiar with techno music at the time, so I was really shocked to see thousands of people dancing in the arena to techno music"
>
> TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI



» [Dreamcast] While the story in *Rez* is not really all that well explained, you're essentially tasked with awakening an AI in cyberspace called Eden.



» [Dreamcast] The player character, Hacker, has been nicknamed Swayzak, owing to a mix-up on US late-night programme Toonami.

known as synaesthesia, a condition where one sensory stimulation triggers an unconnected sense, such as perceiving sound as colour. Originally wanting to be a music video director, Mizuguchi knew he wanted to create a new experience that would be "a combination of audio, visual, even haptics, the human touch, or the inner senses", but it wasn't until 1997 that inspiration struck when he visited Zurich, Switzerland and experienced Street Parade, the largest techno parade in the world with around a million attendees.

"I wasn't familiar with techno music at the time, so I was really shocked to see thousands of people dancing in the arena to techno music. Not like dancing, but people grooving with sound, their movements changing according to the way the sound changed and the lights move and change," he explains. "I saw that kind of a landscape from the top of the arena with tens of thousands of people dancing." That was Mizuguchi's first sensation of synaesthesia, though at the time he didn't know how to describe it. He would later learn about Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian Bauhaus artist whose abstract paintings were said to be based on his synaesthetic experiences, the painter's name referenced under *Rez*'s original working title *K-Project*.

The other inspiration came from a video in Africa captured by *Rez*'s sound director Keiichi Sugiyama, which the team studied over and over with fascination. "People are eating at this street bar in Kenya, then in the middle of dinner, somebody starts to ring the glasses," says Mizuguchi, mimicking the percussive sound. "After that, the other guys are clapping and tapping, and other people are swaying, and then a lady suddenly stands up and starts to sing – this big groove and chemistry was what we tried to find."

How then to capture the sensation of synaesthesia with the idea or music evolving as you play where you felt in sync to its groove, without having to actually worry about keeping in rhythm? This was where the architecture of a shooter came in, where rather than having to hit buttons to a beat, you simply had a reticle locking onto targets, and each shot would produce sound effects and beats. That the sounds produced would already be in sync to the music helped provide the illusion that players had a sense of the groove, contributing to Mizuguchi's desire to create a game that was both "fun to play but feels good". *Rez* cared less for the bullet hell challenge and high scores of arcade shooters than it did for immersing players in its audio-visual sensory experience.

In discussing the vision he had for *Rez*, the visual side however took less priority, sometimes to other people's frustrations. "Our designers wanted to design a lot, but I told them we needed to find a mechanism first, and we needed to find that confidence with the most simple, minimal thing. At the start, it's almost darkness and no colours, just the simple sounds," Mizuguchi explains. "Marketing people would get really angry with me, 'What the hell is this? How do we promote that?' But from an architecture experience, we needed to start from nothing."

He did however know that the setting would be in cyberspace and would also be infused with the abstract styles of Kandinsky. According to Jake Kazdal, an artist and animator at UGA, it took a number of phases in visual development before the team arrived at the minimalist wireframe aesthetic that *Rez* is now iconic for. "We did a bunch of weird stuff, kind of hip hop stuff, flying trucks with big speakers – everything was cool but it didn't really stick," he explains. "Then we dove into this concept of underwater microscopic life forms, the abstract nature of those and how they can kind of work together and provide this cool but stylised backdrop."

But if early screenshots of *Rez* didn't make it very clear just what kind of game it was supposed to be, then its first external playtest proved that it was far too abstract that no one could tell what was going on, what they were supposed to be doing, or what they were supposed to be shooting. "We were so focused on the feeling of the game, the flow of the game, what the rules are going to be, we weren't super worried about polishing up the user experience yet, so it wasn't received very well," Jake admits.

Rather aptly, the solution to *Rez*'s aesthetic came from a nightclub Jake went to with a friend in Shinjuku. "I think this was right when the Winamp stuff started to get going, where you'd put your MP3s in and it'd play the visuals of the sound." While this was in an age before video cameras on phones were the norm, his friend fortunately always carried around a video camera. Jake naturally asked to borrow his camera, which he used to capture around 20 minutes of the club's pulsing audio visualisers. "That Monday, I went into Mizuguchi's office and showed him the video, 'You have to check this out: it's alive, it's stylised, it's minimal, it's super sexy and super cool.'" Mizuguchi agreed, as did the art director Katsumi Yokota, and that was the art style locked in.

Rez's soundtrack was also different to other game soundtracks, not least for the fact that these were evolving interactive works rather than just recorded tunes being played over. Rather than either a soundtrack produced solely by an internal sound team or licensing existing tracks, Mizuguchi had Sugiyama create the first track for Area 1, *Buggie Running Beeps*, but decided to commission musicians for the other game's levels.

"I travelled around the world over three weeks and we brought Area 1 as a sample to show other musicians and sound artists," Mizuguchi explains. "I met many musicians and DJs who had an interest in our new creation. Not only game music, but at the time, games were not a major thing, so most responses were, 'A game? No, those are simple things, a kid's toy – I don't want to do that.' But some musicians and producers immediately understood we were trying to do something new and loved that kind of challenge." These would include producers like Adam Freeland and Ken Ishii, as well as UK electronic dance pioneers Coldcut.

The final ingredient, albeit an optional one on Dreamcast, was haptics. After all, synaesthesia is connected to multiple senses, though Mizuguchi also admits with a laugh, "It comes from my arcadey spirit!" Plug in the vibration pack accessory into the controller and players would feel the beat pulsing through their hands along to the screen, enhancing the sensory immersion of playing *Rez* akin to feeling the floor vibrate to the booming sound system of a club.

While all these elements came together to form a transcendental synaesthetic experience, *Rez*'s development was however overshadowed by the Dreamcast's commercial failure, already in decline in early 2000 as consumers decided to hold out for the launch of the PlayStation 2. In January 2001, while UGA was still developing *Rez*, alongside *Space Channel 5 Part 2*, Mizuguchi called everyone in the studio for a joint meeting to break the news that Sega would be getting out of the console business.

"There wasn't a lot of crossover between our teams and we rarely had studio-wide meetings, but on

State Of Art

JAKE KAZDAL RE-REZZES MEMORIES OF HIS DREAM JOB AT SEGA

As an artist, what were you responsible for in *Rez*?
I animated the main character and I designed the characters for the first and second stage. I also worked on the prototype of the first boss back when it was like this octopus-jellyfish, which turned into a much more abstract geometric thing. I actually translated the text into English for Area 5, but Yokota-san was the mind behind all that.

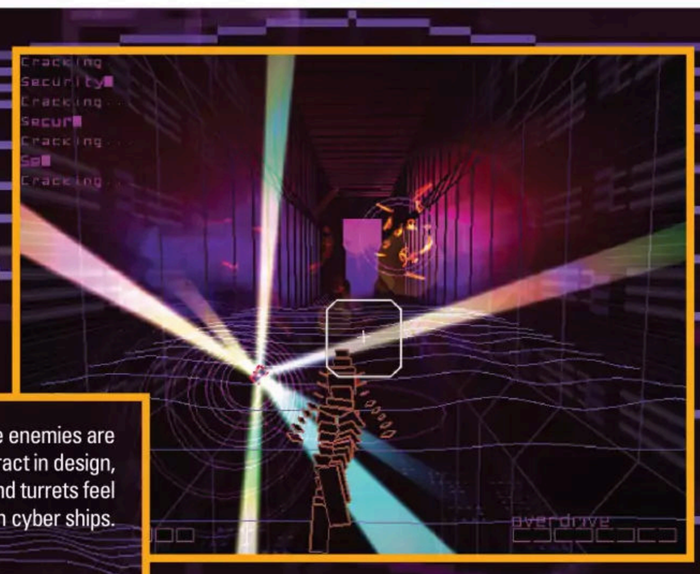
How did you manage to work in Japan without speaking any Japanese?
When I was working on *Space Channel 5*, the art director took me under her wing and she'd love to practise her English, so we kind of built a rapport, so I just kind of picked it up. I'd sit in design meetings taking notes, listening for words that I was hearing over and over again, and then bug teammates afterwards to help me figure these out, so I built my vocabulary from the ground up. I was also going out clubbing and meeting people on weekends, you're just immersed in it, and you just pick it up before too long. I was definitely misunderstanding things, missing deadlines that someone had set, or I took the opposite of what somebody said. But people were super nice, super friendly and super accommodating.

As UGA was based in Shibuya, did you have much interaction with the rest of Sega HQ?
For the most part, we were pretty detached. It's kind of a bummer actually because I wanted to get to know more people. I found out years later, back when I had moved back to the States, there was another American guy there named Trevor Stricker who had been working on the *Panzer Dragoon Orta* team over at the Haneda office at the same time!

Your studio recently released its first VR game, but what was it like seeing *Rez* in VR for the first time?
Rez Infinite was super surreal because my whole relationship with these characters had been on a monitor about the size of a CRT that was split into four quadrants, and a little 3D view. To see these things now the size of a van whooshing over my head – I made that, my concept is suddenly 100 times bigger and you're in the world – it totally blew me away. And part of what blew me away is just how timeless the art style was, it totally holds up.

» Members of UGA, including Mizuguchi with bleached hair, celebrating the Japanese launch of *Rez*, also Sega's first PS2 game.

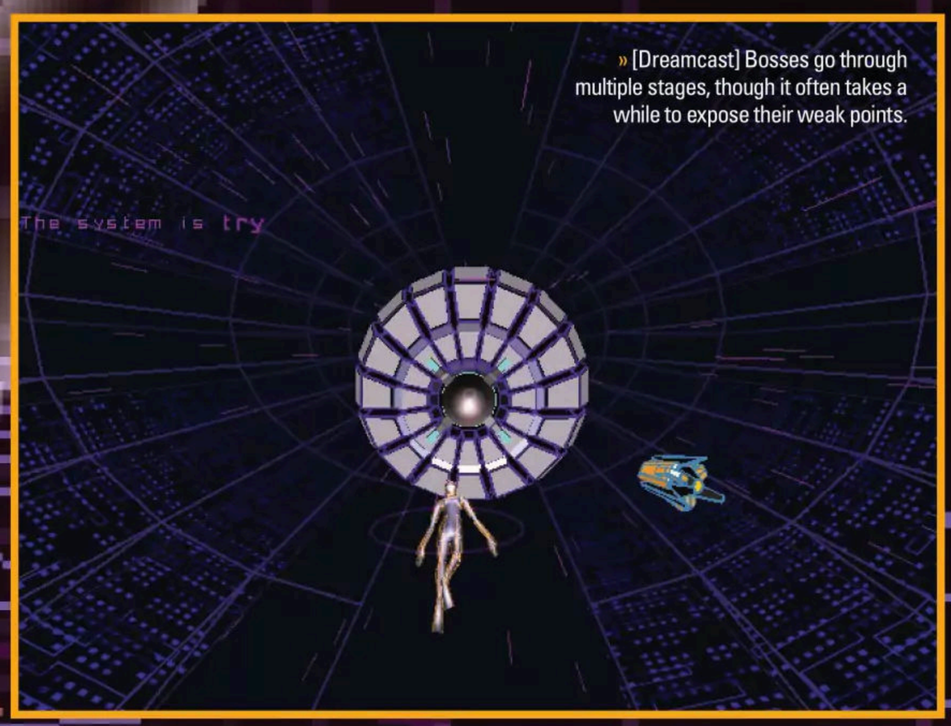
» [Dreamcast] While enemies are quite deliberately abstract in design, these hulking masses and turrets feel like a battle with cyber ships.



» [Dreamcast] Data nodes are hard to miss, but if you don't shoot them all, the final area won't unlock.

» [Dreamcast] Area 4's running man is probably *Rez*'s most inspired boss – at one point in development, the player character was a running girl.

"There wasn't a lot of crossover between our teams and we rarely had studio-wide meetings"
JAKE KASDAL



» [Dreamcast] Bosses go through multiple stages, though it often takes a while to expose their weak points.

» [Dreamcast] Pay close attention and you'll notice plenty of ancient cultural references beneath the abstract wireframe geometry, including sphinxes.

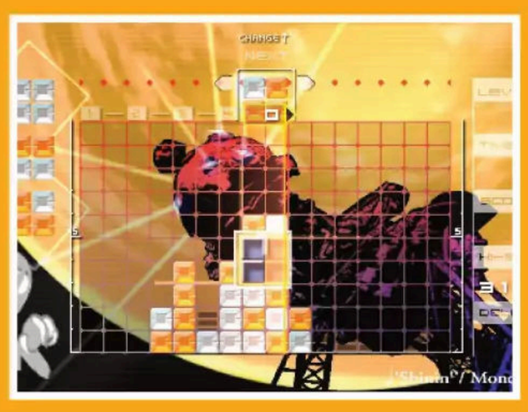
Musical Mizuguchi

MORE MUSIC-THEMED GAMES FROM MIZUGUCHI'S CAREER

SPACE CHANNEL 5

1999 • DREAMCAST

Essentially a Simon Says-style rhythm game like *Parappa The Rapper* but without the freestyling, Ulala is a pink-haired space reporter who fights brainwashing aliens and rival reporters through the power of dance. Keep your ratings high, rescue more people and they follow you like a party parade, evolving the music.



LUMINES: PUZZLE FUSION

2004 • PSP

Mizuguchi's first game at his own studio Q Entertainment would leverage the potential of Sony's new handheld as an "interactive Walkman", leading to a music-based puzzle game. The idea of clearing blocks using a sweeping 'time line' is ingenious in itself, but the audio and visuals takes it to another level.

CHILD OF EDEN

2011 • PS3, XBOX 360

A spiritual successor to *Rez*, this is also a musical rail shooter as the player enters a virtual realm called Eden and journeys into its Archives, purging it of viruses in order to resurrect Lumi by piecing her memories together. It also incorporates motion controls, via PS3's Move controllers or Kinect on Xbox 360.

REZ INFINITE

2016 • PS4/VARIOUS

After taking a hiatus, Mizuguchi returned to *Rez*, this time reimagined through the game-changing arrival of consumer VR. The new immersive perspective was also the opportunity to create a brand-new standalone level, Area X, featuring new particle effects achieved with Unreal Engine, which also broke free of the original's on-rails gameplay.

TETRIS EFFECT

2018 • PS4/VARIOUS

In the works for years, considering this was what *Lumines* was originally intended to be, *Tetris Effect* transforms a timeless game into a meditative concept album that imbues those iconic blocks with different sound effects, as well a whole new life-affirming meaning. Yes, it really is all connected.

The evolution of Rez

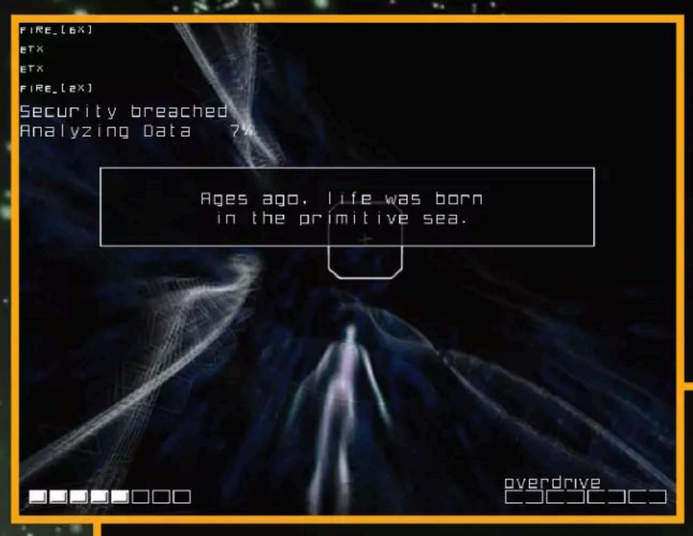
FROM THE SCREEN TO VR TO REZONANCE

Rez's synaesthesia hasn't been limited to just the screen, and we don't just mean *Rez Infinite*'s leap to VR. In fact, when the latter made its debut, some might recall it premiered alongside what was dubbed the Synaesthesia Suit, a collaboration with Japanese media artist collective Rhizomatics, taking the concept of immersive haptic feedback to another level with a suit with 26 actuators that lets the wearer feel the textures of the visuals and sound pulsing through different parts of their body.

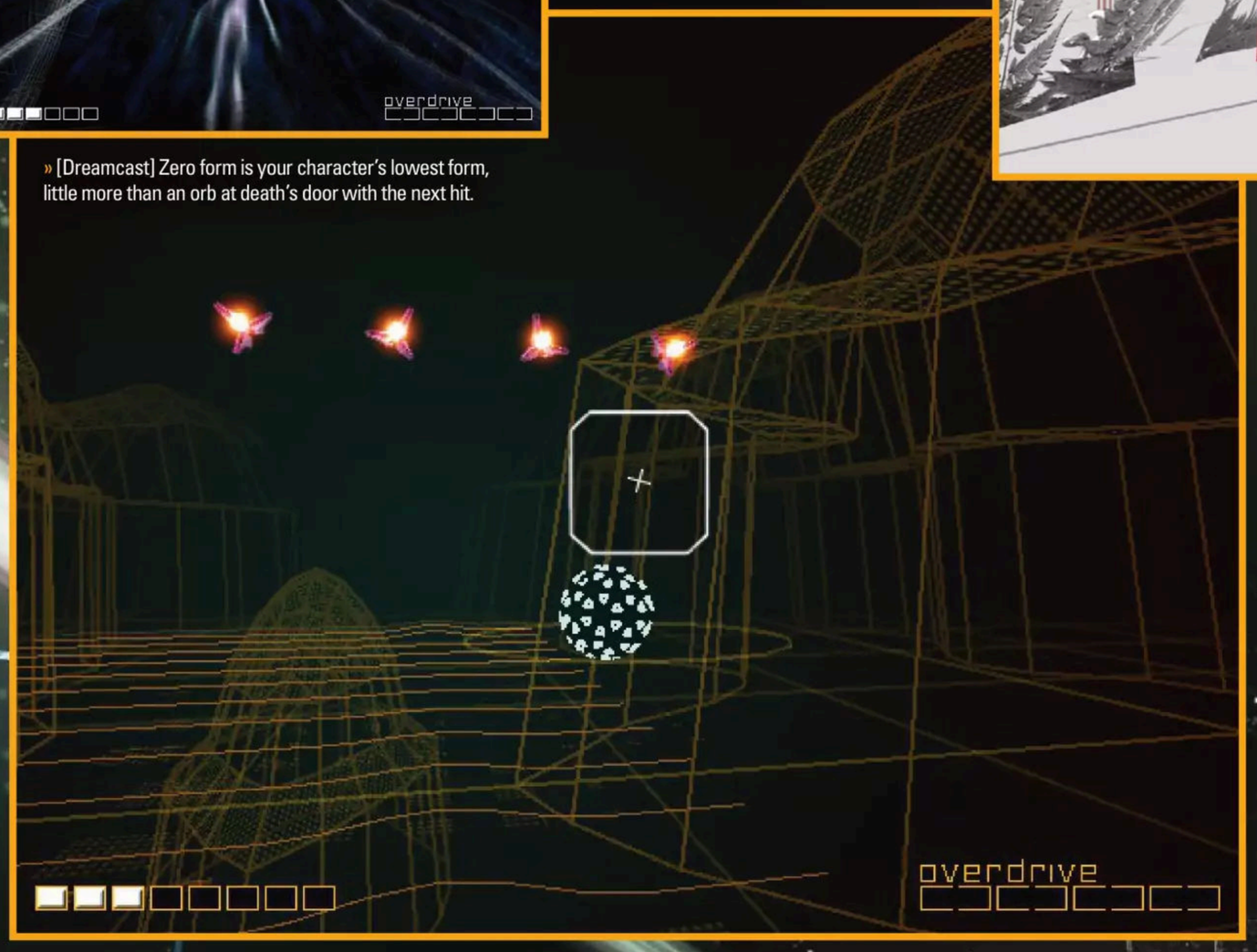
While Mizuguchi admits the suit was purely for promotional and marketing purposes, he decided to work with Rhizomatics again in a brand-new work that transforms *Rez* into a real spatial experience. *Rezonance* is an installation as part of a larger audio-visual exhibition called *Virtual Realms*, which has Mizuguchi as a guest co-curator, with other installations including interpretations of games like *Dreams*, *Death Stranding* and *Rime*.

Rather than a single-player experience, *Rezonance* has up to four participants where each becomes a 'traveller' holding a haptic sphere. Sort of resembling the *Rez* player's Zero Form, the spheres react to the light and sound in the space in connection with the other spheres – depending on where and how you move, the lights, visuals, sounds and haptics all change.

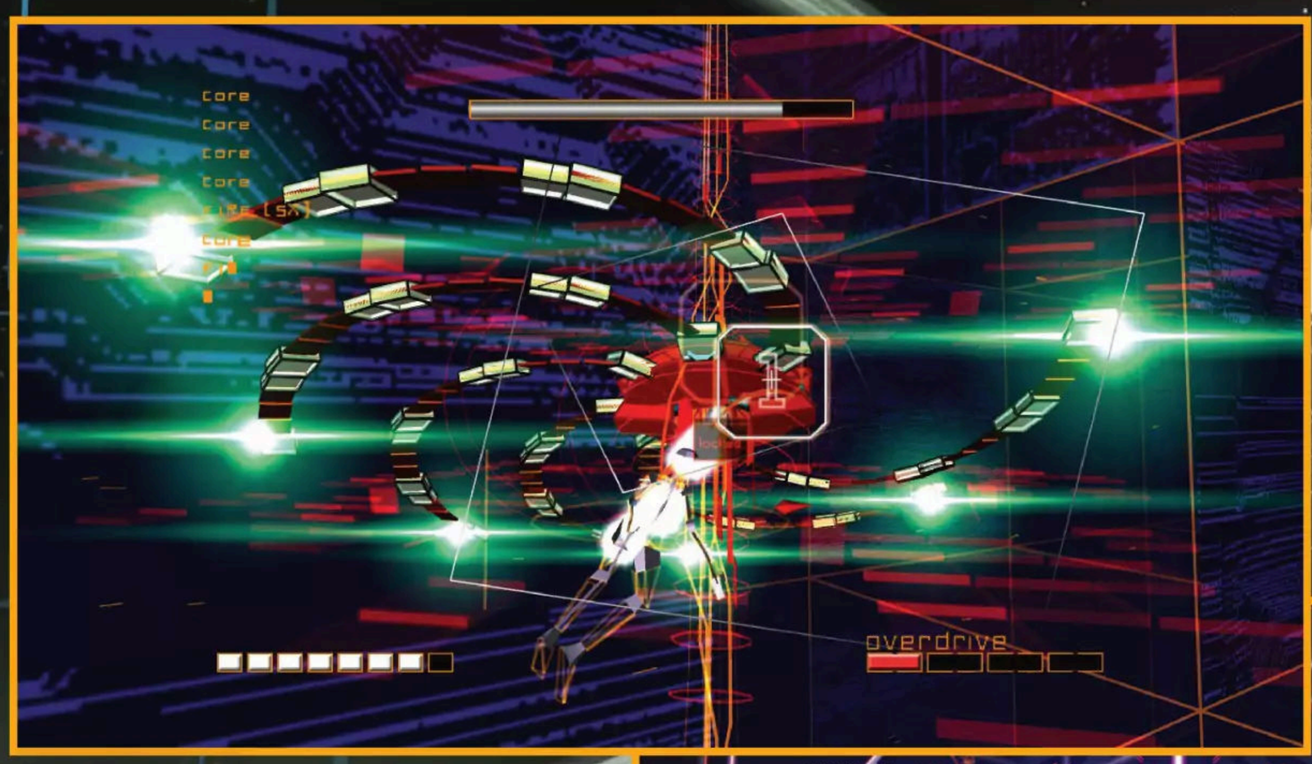
Virtual Realms is currently exhibiting at the ArtScience Museum in Singapore, although pandemic restrictions have meant a lot of challenges in getting it set up – even Mizuguchi has been unable to try it himself. However, the exhibition intends to tour internationally, assuming conditions improve in the real world, and as the project's a collaboration with London's Barbican Centre, it's almost certain to make its way to these shores in the near future. In that time however, we could find *Rez* evolving once again, as Mizuguchi also teased that they had made a synaesthesia chair!



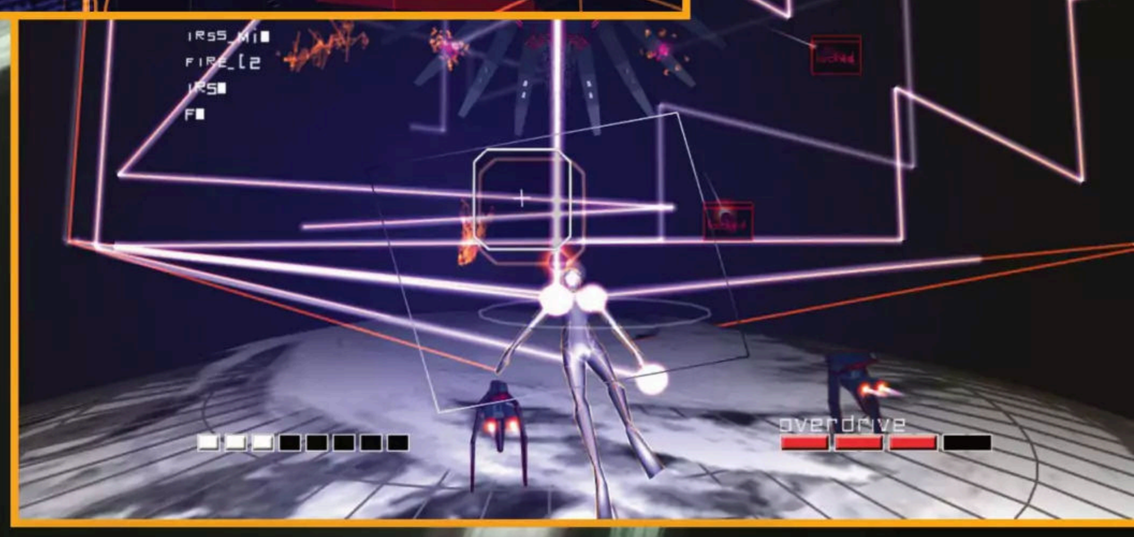
» [Dreamcast] The final area is arguably the closest *Rez* gets to a narrative, charting the evolution of life.



» [Dreamcast] Zero form is your character's lowest form, little more than an orb at death's door with the next hit.



» [Xbox 360] The HD update of *Rez* was excellent. It still pains us that a version never made it to the Vita.

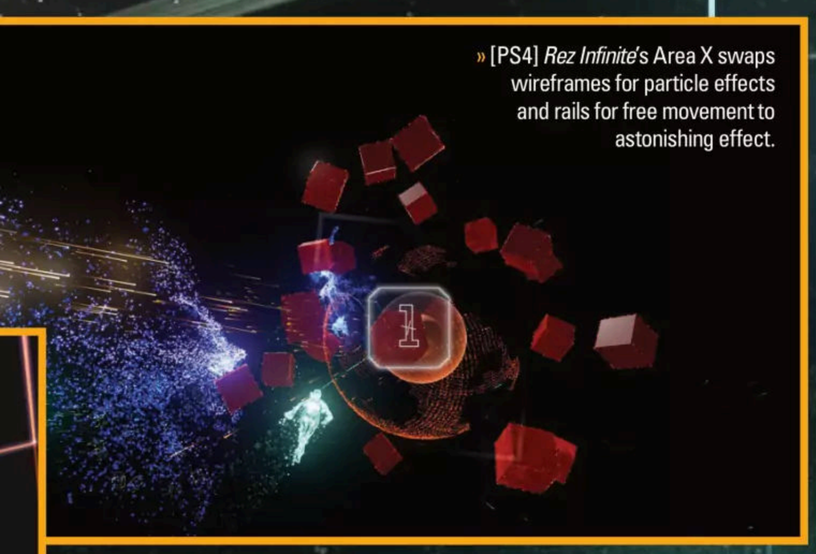


» [Xbox 360] Adam Freeland's *Fear* complements the on-screen action of Area 5 perfectly. What a pity this particular version didn't reach the official soundtrack that's available to buy.

"One of the reasons that I joined Sega was I wanted to make something in VR"

TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI

» [PC] Experiencing the original *Rez* in VR is really quite something.



» [PS4] *Rez Infinite*'s Area X swaps wireframes for particle effects and rails for free movement to astonishing effect.

this day, Mizuguchi-san asked everyone to fit into the one room that could barely fit everybody, and he was real sombre," Jake recalls. "He announced that Sega is going to get out of hardware and we're going to quit working on Dreamcast and work for other companies. In that whole room of about 50 people, no one said a word, they were just in shock."

Looking back on it, Mizuguchi says it was a really sad thing for Sega but it was also a good thing for game development, as this now meant *Rez* could reach a larger audience, with the game not only releasing on Dreamcast but Sega's first official game as a third-party developer and publisher on PS2 – the Dreamcast version was however not released in the US, while Sony handled publishing of the PS2 version in Europe. There were also benefits with developing on more powerful hardware, since the game could run at 60fps compared to the original 30fps (though Jake says he prefers the Dreamcast's use of anti-aliasing). For enhancing the sensory experience, the PS2 version also had a limited release of a USB-powered Trance Vibrator so that players could feel the haptic feedback on another part of their body instead of just through their hands on the controller, which naturally had plenty of people snickering over the implications.

Unfortunately, an additional platform wasn't enough to expand *Rez*'s reach, not helped by having a full price for what was essentially a short arcade game with little replay value. Sega also seemed to have little confidence in the game, reportedly shipping it in small quantities and doing little to market this new experience. While it did find acclaim from critics – notably a 9/10 score from *Edge*, which placed it just behind *Halo: Combat Evolved* as the best game that year, in an era of high-fidelity graphics aping photorealism, *Rez*'s style was perhaps just too abstract to cut through to the mainstream.

That spelled the end for both *Rez* – although Jake mentions there was an "awesome" concept video for a sequel, it was naturally never greenlit – and UGA, who not only had another original action platforming title canned by a Sega Of America executive, but was eventually dissolved following an internal restructuring in 2003. The staff were rolled into Sonic Team, who was working on a licensed tie-in of *Astro Boy*, in other words the total opposite direction for a team who had prided themselves on new and original content. Mizuguchi left Sega shortly after this, as did most of the other members, including Jake, who decided to go to design school back in the States, though he eventually returned to Japan to run his own studio years later.

Yet *Rez*'s story was far from over, its influence continuing to reverberate throughout Mizuguchi's career, notably the spiritual successor *Child Of Eden*. Despite the demise of UGA, when speaking of his departure from Sega, he says, "Now I feel free. We can work for anyone, any platforms, with any ideas." Later, he was able to acquire the rights for *Rez* to give the game another shot with an HD port released on Xbox Live Arcade in 2008. Handled by both his company Q Entertainment and Hexadrive, *Rez HD* was an improved version, not only changing the aspect ratio, eliminating the jaggies of the original, and doubling the framerate, but digital distribution also meant it could be sold at a budget price, making the short experimental title more enticing.

Despite calling it the "complete *Rez*" at the time, Mizuguchi still wasn't done. The only issue was he was still waiting for the technology to catch up, which wouldn't come for another eight years under his new company Enhance. Given the cyberspace premise, *Rez* was undoubtedly a terrific fit for VR, which was something he had always imagined for the game. "One of the reasons that I joined Sega was I wanted to make something in VR," Mizuguchi explains. "I saw some pictures from NASA's first developed virtual reality system in the Eighties, and I had confidence that the games industry could make it real with new tech in a few years, but it was still too early in the Nineties."

With consumer VR finally arriving in 2016 with the Oculus Rift followed by PlayStation VR, Mizuguchi was finally able to update *Rez* for VR, under the new title *Rez Infinite*. Rather than simply porting the original into VR, it was an opportunity to break from the railed experience and experiment with what else *Rez* was capable of, leading to the creation of its new stage, Area X. He explains that this new freedom was initially scary for the team having to adjust to the risks of players getting motion sickness in VR, though the team kept fine-tuning until they could get back the fun and feel good experience of the original *Rez*.

While *Rez Infinite*, especially Area X on its own, was lauded with acclaim, it again also felt like Mizuguchi was just scratching the surface on what VR can do to further enhance his vision of synaesthesia. That much was confirmed earlier this year in a *Famitsu* interview, when he referred to *Rez Infinite* as a "prologue" to a new synaesthesia-style game for next-gen consoles, coincidentally just before a new VR headset was announced for PS5. While nothing has been confirmed, it wouldn't be a surprise for this new game to appear on Sony's console, taking advantage of both the console's 3D audio and the haptics of the DualSense controller.

"We have no details we can talk about yet, but it's very exciting to develop a new synaesthesia adventure," he says. "All the time, new evolutions deliver new inspiration for us – we love new technology!" As long as the industry keeps emerging with new tech and possibilities, it seems Mizuguchi's synaesthesia journey is far from over. *

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Super Mario 64

» **PLATFORM:** NINTENDO 64 » **RELEASED:** 1996 » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD

The mid-Nineties were an exciting time for gaming with many popular franchises making the leap to the third dimension. While you knew a *Mario* game would be appearing on Nintendo's new 64-bit system, you had decided to go in cold and were doing your best to avoid the early screenshots and previews that started to appear in magazines.

Excitement eventually got the better of you and a few articles had you convinced that Nintendo's launch game was something to get very excited about. The N64 finally arrived and you booted *Super Mario 64* up, to be greeted by the immortal words, "It's-a me, Mario."

All of a sudden, a huge, fully 3D visage of the iconic plumber appeared on-screen and he looked amazing. What's more, you quickly realised that the tiny glove that appeared allowed you to manipulate and contort Mario's face in all manner of silly directions. You were having the time of your life sodding about with the intro screen, but the real fun was just about to begin… *

BIO

There was plenty of excitement around the release of *Super Mario 64*. Nintendo was late to the 3D console party, with its N64 arriving in Japan in June 1996, a good 19 months after its 32-bit competitors, the PlayStation and Saturn. *Super Mario 64* arrived with the console as a pack-in title and it was certainly worth the wait. Nintendo's game delivered convincingly solid 3D courses to explore and run riot in, along with a number of exciting new moves for Mario that allowed him to fully explore these new worlds. Mario may well have been late to the party, but his adventure set a standard that later games would endlessly copy.

MORE CLASSIC SUPER MARIO 64 MOMENTS

Besting Bowser

Your first meeting with the King Of The Koopas is certainly a memorable one. After navigating a treacherous level you finally reach him. Nipping around his back, you reach out and grab Bowser's tail and start spinning him. A few more twirls of the analogue stick and he spins faster, allowing you to hurl him into the ether. So long, Bowser!

Take To The Skies

One of Mario's best new power-ups in *Super Mario 64* is his Wing Cap, which you can get by activating a Red Switch found early on in the game. Once a hat is grabbed, Mario can leap into the air and start to soar around until the hat's power diminishes. It might not last all that long, but while it does, it feels intoxicating and liberating, allowing you to experience the brilliance of *Super Mario 64*'s courses in a brand-new way.

Penguin Racing

It's established early on in *Super Mario 64* that you can race against some of the game's denizens. One of our favourites takes place in Cool, Cool Mountain when you take on a particularly arrogant penguin. While an earlier race against Koopa The Quick was fun, it wasn't particularly challenging. Your penguin opponent is a far tricker adversary, as you not only have to deal with his speed, but also a very twisty and turning slide. One wrong turn and you'll fall into oblivion.

Big But Small

Many of *Super Mario 64*'s courses are themed and one of the best is Tiny-Huge Island. You've seen all manner of impressive-looking locations, from the fiery lava lakes of Lethal Lava Land to the chilly climes of Cool, Cool Mountain, but Tiny-Huge Island is on another level. One minute Mario is towering over his opponents like an almighty goliath, the next he's shrunken down and dodging their feet. It's a great course that's arguably elevated by the game's slick 3D engine.

THE MAKING OF DARKWATCH

VAMPIRES AND VIOLENCE, COWBOYS AND CARNAGE – WHAT MORE DO YOU NEED FOR A GOOD TIME? SADDLE UP AS WE SINK OUR TEETH INTO DARKWATCH, THE GAME FROM HIGH MOON STUDIOS THAT BROUGHT THE FPS TO A HAUNTED WEST. DUCK, YOU BLOODSUCKER!

WORDS BY JAMES DYSON

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM (NA), UBISOFT (EUR)

» **DEVELOPER:** HIGH MOON STUDIOS

» **RELEASED:** 2005

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

» **GENRE:** ACTION

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

NAME: ROBERT LUDLUM'S THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PS3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2008

TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON
SYSTEM: PS3, PC, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2010

TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON
SYSTEM: PS3, XBOX 360
YEAR: 2011

Give me a home, where the vampires roam, where the dead and damnable play. In the heyday of the sixth console generation, there was one game that brought players a world of ghouls, guts and gunslingers. That game was *Darkwatch*; a grimdark Gothic epic following the blood-soaked trail of outlaw Jericho Cross. After robbing the wrong train one fateful night, Jericho accidentally unleashes an ancient vampire lord named Lazarus Malkoth, getting turned into a bloodsucker in the bargain. His only hope lies in the titular Darkwatch, a secret order founded in the dying days of Ancient Rome and dedicated to fighting evil wherever it hides. Armed with an array of deadly weapons and supernatural abilities, Jericho must ally with the Darkwatch to stop Lazarus and his curse of undeath before it's too late.

Rather ironically for a Western, *Darkwatch* had its genesis out East, in Japan. In the early Noughties, Tokyo-based pachinko company Sammy Corporation had ambitions to become an international videogame publisher. As a result, it invested heavily in a new facility in Carlsbad, San Diego, christening the offshoot Sammy Studios. It then hired the former VP of Midway Games John Rowe to head up the studio. John in turn reached out to Emmanuel Valdez, a creative director he'd worked with at Midway. Emmanuel quickly brought in three other individuals: Chris Ulm, Paul O'Connor and visual director Farzad Varahramyan, who had all previously worked together on the first two *Oddworld* games. These four individuals – Emmanuel, Chris, Paul and Farzad – would together constitute the core creative team of *Darkwatch*.

From the outset, Sammy Studios (later renamed High Moon Studios) was designed with creating original IPs in mind. In addition to the team's experience on *Oddworld*, Emmanuel had been responsible for creating the *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing* series, whilst Chris had been editor-in-chief at Malibu Comics for over a decade. As such, the developers were well-suited to creating a new franchise, and soon got approval from Sammy Corporation to develop two games; a Western that eventually became *Darkwatch*, and a sci-fi shooter that never saw the light of day.

"I don't remember why we thought a Western would be the right theme for our shooter," says Farzad, "but I remember Chris and Paul laughing hysterically at the concept of a powdered wig, musket-loading Civil War reenactment game with brutally strict rules of engagement, which would reduce the player's experience down to a historically accurate but mind-numbing grind."

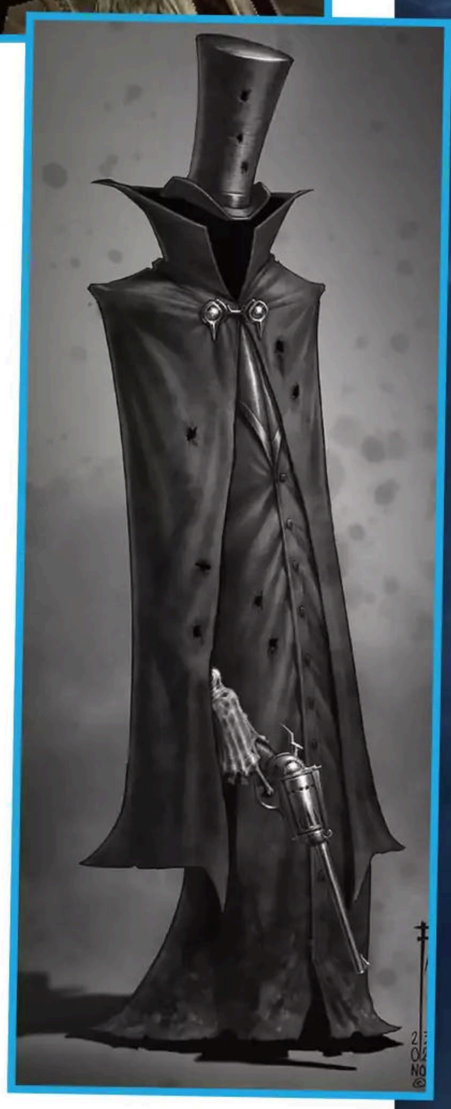
> "WE DECIDED THAT PLAYERS WANTED TO CONTROL A BADASS"
> CHRIS ULM

It was decided from a very early stage, then, that the game couldn't just be a straightforward Western. In part, this was down to the above fears about slow-firing period weapons, but it was also part of a wider aversion to the concept of doing a vanilla Western generally. "The marketing team had arranged some very early concept testing, recalls Meelad Sadat, *Darkwatch*'s PR manager. "[It was] conducted by some big firm that came back and said players aren't interested in games set in the American West. I remember distinctly how their report kept calling it the 'Old West' and saying how people equated it with slow paced-movies and barren wastelands with rolling tumbleweeds."

Instead, the team decided to take the game in a more fantastical direction. Provisionally named *Curse Of The West*, the game would feature outlandish steampunk weaponry and be a lighthearted affair, taking visual and tonal inspiration from *Oddworld* and Pixar films. Jericho himself was a far cry from the undying outlaw he would become. Initially named Chaz Bartlet, several concepts for him were tried out, including a buffalo rider, a skilled gunsmith and a clock maker from New York with a trained pet monkey assistant. Loosely based on the character of Maverick from the Sixties TV series, this riverboat gambler type would travel across the West in search of fortune and glory, using his custom-built gadgets to get out of trouble.

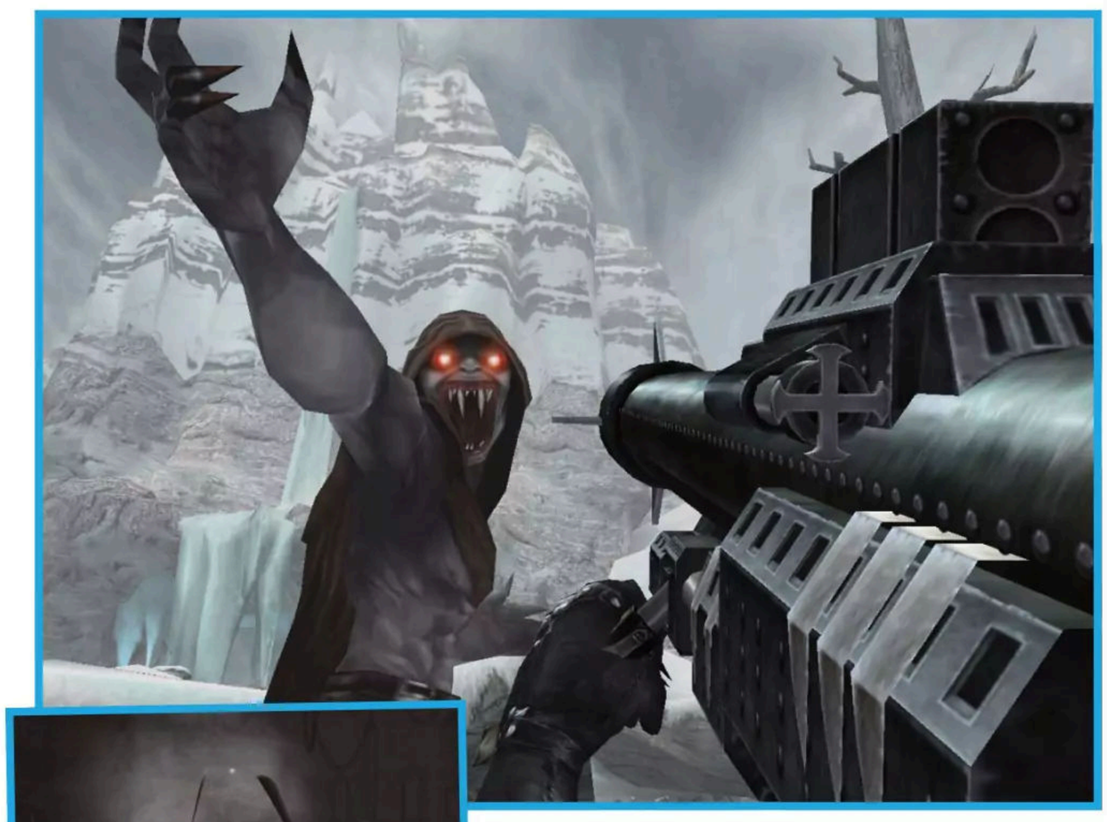
Two subsequent developments would finally set *Curse Of The West* down the path to becoming *Darkwatch*. The first was a revelation the team ▶

» [PlayStation 2] "Oh, they're goin' ta have to glue you back together… IN HELL!" Beware skeletons bearing bombs.

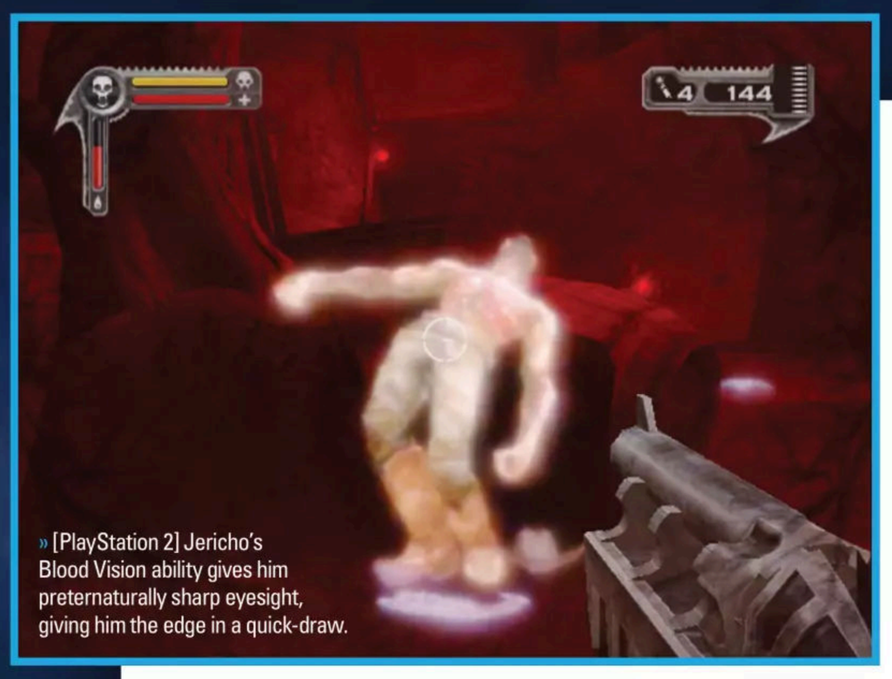


» The Nightmare, a scrapped enemy for *Darkwatch*. Visual director Farzad Varahramyan's favourite creature, this monster was an eyeless, spider-like monster that hid beneath the clothes of an undertaker before bursting out in a flurry of limbs and bullets. The team ultimately dropped this design, as they felt it was too much of a one-trick pony.

» Paul O'Connor, *Darkwatch*'s design director.



» [PlayStation 2] Vipers are fast, deadly enemies that can teleport short distances to get up close and personal with their prey.



» [PlayStation 2] Jericho's Blood Vision ability gives him preternaturally sharp eyesight, giving him the edge in a quick-draw.

» [PlayStation 2] Ignore what Blue Oyster Cult says; definitely fear the reaper! These skeletal adversaries use sheer numbers to overwhelm their victims.

» [PlayStation 2] The Blackfish Carbine is an accurate and fast-firing repeating rifle that excels at putting down foes at mid-range.

had about the game's protagonist. "We realised that nobody actually wanted to play as a character called Chaz Bartlet," laughs Chris. "Ultimately, we decided that players wanted to control a badass, not someone more humorous and cartoonish."

As a result, Farzad began refining the main character, getting progressively darker with each iteration and slowly dropping the game's goofier elements. At around the same time, they also decided to give the game a more supernatural focus, quickly settling on using vampires as the game's main monster.

"We liked vampires for a couple of reasons," says Chris. "They can take a tremendous amount of damage and regenerate, they have all these powers, and they're incredibly strong. So all of these things make them both great enemies, but more importantly, are great attributes of a hero character."

The vampire element also gave *Darkwatch* its unique Gothic look, which the marketing team would eventually label 'Haunted West'. "We really hit our aesthetic signature when Chris came up with two key premises for *Darkwatch*" says Farzad. "One; everything would have 'fangs' of some kind. Second; the Darkwatch organisation would use every part of a slain vampire, like the Native Americans of the Old West used every part of a buffalo. Nothing was wasted, and every part of the vampire was used to help the Darkwatch's tech. For example, vampire skin was bulletproof, so it would be stitched into a Darkwatch agent's clothing. Or vampire blood would be added to fuel, so that the organisation's vehicles could run faster and harder than any other vehicle of the time."

With the game's basic look established, the next major challenge came from working out how *Darkwatch* would play. "There was a big unspoken aspect of *Darkwatch* that we knew would be key to its success," recalls Meelad, "And that was control. Doing a quality shooter on console wasn't easy back in the early Noughties. Some would-be decent games died on that battlefield, where you had great visuals, great story, triple-A production, but the part of the experience that stood out was struggling with targeting or some other wonky mechanic."

Fortunately for the developers, there was one game that had already blazed a trail in this regard. *Halo: Combat Evolved* released to critical acclaim in 2001, convincing players worldwide that a satisfying shooter need not be the preserve of PC gamers.

"*Halo* was a North Star for us," says Paul. "We played the heck out of that game. Multiple times per week we'd cable four boxes together and have a local LAN match with 16 players. As a game evolves it becomes its own thing, but *Halo* certainly pointed the way for us and saved us months of blind alleys in trying to decide how best to do an FPS on console."

> "AS HALO FANS, WE WERE ALL IN LOVE WITH PISTOLS"
> **PAUL O'CONNOR**

It's easy to see *Halo*'s fingerprints on *Darkwatch*. Like Master Chief, Jericho can only carry two weapons at a time, has a dedicated grenade-throw button, can pistol-whip enemies, and comes with his own vampiric regenerating shield. The Darkwatch organisation also has the Steam Waggon, a gatling-gun-toting vehicle that bears more than a passing resemblance to the UNSC's Warthog, and the iconic Redeemer pistol, a multi-cylinder revolver whose impressive damage output mirrors that of *Halo*'s (in) famously powerful magnum.

"As *Halo* guys, we were all in love with pistols," admits Paul. "In *Halo* the super weapon was the pistol; if you could pull off a jump and headshot – which is what Em [Emmanuel Valdez] used to do to me all the time – you'd dominate the game.

» [PlayStation 2] Jericho will meet innocent citizens trying to survive. Protect them, or use them as a tasty blood bag? Your choice.

» [PlayStation 2] Giddy-up there! Jericho rides like the devil himself is at his heels. That's probably because he is.

HEROES AND VILLAINS

FRIENDS AND FOES IN A WICKED WEST

JERICHO CROSS

A jaded Civil War veteran turned gunslinger, Jericho becomes the Darkwatch's unwilling secret weapon and last hope after accidentally unleashing Lazarus during a botched train robbery. A man of few words, he prefers to let his guns do the talking for him instead.

CASSIDY SHARP

Orphaned by vampires as a child, Cassidy was taken into the Darkwatch at a young age and has since become one of its finest Regulators. The designers created Cassidy as a stand-in for *Halo*'s Cortana, tasked with guiding the player throughout Jericho's journey.

TALA

Fearless and independent, Tala is just as dangerous as the creatures the Darkwatch hunts. Whilst she will happily expend human lives with a frightening coldness, her undeniable ability to achieve victory in the face of overwhelming odds makes her a valued asset to the Darkwatch.

OOZER

What weighs three tons, has a face full of teeth and is armed with a pair of bloody cleavers? Oozers are some of the most disgustingly resilient (and just plain disgusting) creatures Jericho will face, soaking up enormous amounts of damage and spewing acidic bile.

» [PlayStation 2] The Darkwatch's repeating crossbow has explosive-tipped bolts to give it that extra punch in combat.

So I think we had this sort of in-built bias where, if you could master the pistol, you could probably beat the whole game just with that." Guns are nothing without some satisfying enemies to shoot, and *Darkwatch* features a suitably grisly rogues gallery to rebury, including skeletons, banshees, bloodsuckers and undead cowboys. Besides the gunplay, the game also features a number of upgradable vampire powers and a moral choice system that affects which ending and final boss the player gets. No Western game would be complete without horseback rides, and the campaign has several setpiece sequences with Jericho mounted on his necromantic steed. The Xbox version supported online versus multiplayer matches of up to 16 players, whilst PlayStation 2 edition offered local split-screen campaign co-op and PVP matches instead.

Darkwatch was released in late 2005 by Capcom in North America and Ubisoft in Europe. The game sold well and earned positive reviews, with particular praise given to its unique visual style. Yet behind the scenes, *Darkwatch*'s development had been a rocky ride, the results of which likely stopped the IP from reaching its full potential.

Early on in *Darkwatch*'s development process, Sammy Corporation had merged with Sega to become Sammy Sega Holdings. Sammy Sega then sought to shut down the operation in Carlsbad, with only John Rowe's intervention saving the studio from complete dissolution. Thanks to his efforts, a buyout was negotiated and Sammy Studios went independent, renaming itself High Moon Studios in the process. After some painful downsizing, the studio then did work for hire for Vivendi Games, splitting its efforts between *Darkwatch* and a *Jason Bourne* game. During all this time, the studio still needed a publisher for *Darkwatch*, only reaching an agreement with Capcom and Ubisoft a mere three months before the game's release.

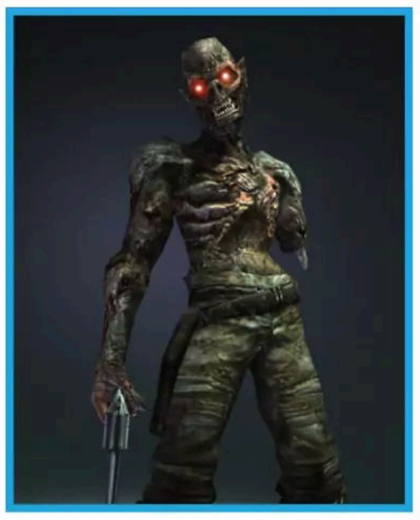
In the run-up to its launch, *Darkwatch* made a fair fist of its marketing, with features in *Heavy Metal* magazine and *Playboy*. However, neither Capcom nor Ubisoft had much incentive to support *Darkwatch* beyond release, a factor that the developers feel limited the games impact.

"None of our publishers had a vested interest in pursuing the title in terms of building it for the future, or building it up into a hit, because they didn't own the IP," explains Chris. "I don't think the game in either one of our markets got the sort of support that it would have, had it been owned and controlled by the publishers that were distributing it."

In the end, *Darkwatch* never managed to become the blockbuster original IP its creators hoped it would be. Vivendi purchased High Moon and the rights to *Darkwatch* with it shortly after release, before in turn being absorbed by Activision Blizzard. The *Darkwatch* IP has languished ever since, with Activision showing no interest in resurrecting it. Yet those who remember the game often do so fondly, and it's still has a following within the industry. In 2017, for example, Capcom was looking through its back catalogue of IPs for games to resurrect. *Darkwatch* came up, and Capcom Vancouver developed some early prototypes before realising that it did not, in fact, own the rights. As a result, it hired Paul to develop a game "heavily inspired" (his words) by *Darkwatch*, who spent about a year developing this title. While it ultimately went nowhere, it shows that – like the vampires it depicts – *Darkwatch*'s legacy has never truly died. ✱

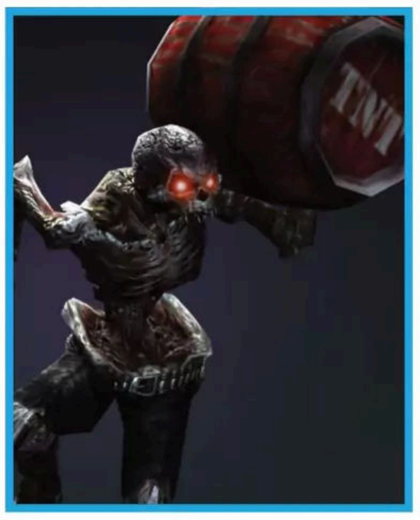
REAPER

The West is filled with the unmarked graves of those who have met a violent end. Now their reanimated husks burst forth from the ground to wreak their terrible vengeance, sickles clasped in bony hands and eye sockets glowing with an unholy light.



GUNSLINGER

Those that live by the sword die by the sword, though lately death has become a lot less permanent for these ghoulish gunslingers. Armed with a set of six-shooters and a mean temperament, only the quickest trigger finger will save you from joining their ranks.



KEGGER

The ranks of Lazarus' rotten hordes have little concern for self-preservation; after all, they're already dead! Armed with a barrel of dangerously volatile explosives, Keggers will rush forward with the sole purpose of blowing them and their victims sky high in one almighty fireball.

NOT ON MY WATCH

THE DARKWATCH FRANCHISE THAT NEVER WAS

The developers had always intended *Darkwatch* to be the first instalment of a much larger IP, with ambitions to span multiple games and forms of media. During development, High Moon had entered into talks with studios about a film adaptation, although ultimately these were put on hold as it negotiated its acquisition by Vivendi.

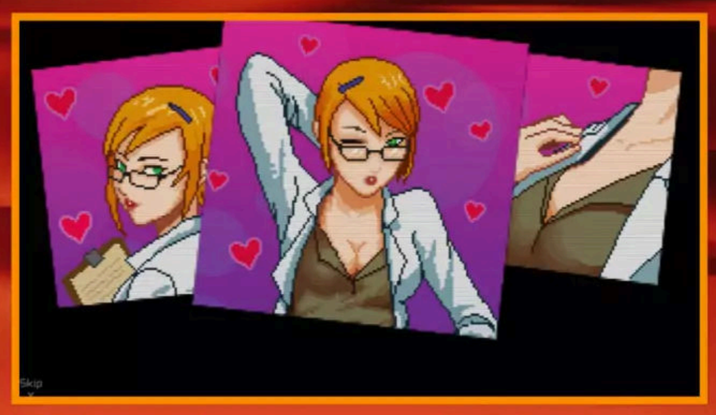
The studio got the greenlight to start work on a *Darkwatch* sequel following the release of *Robert Ludlum's The Bourne Conspiracy* in 2008. For *Darkwatch 2*, the developers switched to using Unreal rather than its predecessor's proprietary engine, and shifted the game's perspective from first to third-person. It once again put players in Jericho's spurred boots, this time many centuries in the future. In this world, the vampires had conquered the globe and reshaped it in their image. Humans were held in reservations, the playthings of their undead overlords, who would hunt them for sport and sustenance. North America had been split down the middle by a giant wall, with humanity's last bastion holding out inside it. Jericho would have been awakened from his tomb by the scattered remnants of the Darkwatch and tasked with protecting a young girl, whose blood would have held the key to defeating the vampire menace. Along with new gear and weapons, Jericho had The Infernal Engine, a Gothic Batmobile-like vehicle supercharged by vampire blood. Early on in development, however, Vivendi was acquired by Activision. The publisher immediately shelved the project and reassigned the team to work on a *Transformers* game instead.

UNMETAL

THE FIRST METAL GEAR WAS RELEASED IN 1987 AND, IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THERE HAVE NOT BEEN THAT MANY COMPARABLE 2D TITLES SINCE: TOP-DOWN STEALTH WITH A MODERN SETTING AND A COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF DYNAMIC SYSTEMS WITHIN A PERSISTENT WORLD ARE RARE. THE EXCELLENT UNMETAL LOOKS TO CHANGE THAT

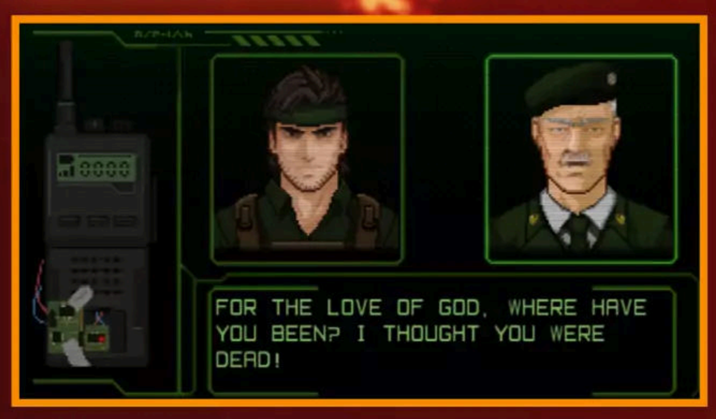
WORDS BY JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

» [PC] The first boss has you avoiding grenades, then firing your slingshot when the timing is right.



» [PC] There are regular cutscenes – some are quite amusing, others have multiple choice questions with different outcomes.

» [PC] There is a vast array of items to find; several have multiple functions, others are combinable to craft new equipment.



» [PC] It wouldn't be a modern-day stealth game without communications; first you need to find the radios and modify them.

Consider our introduction and ponder how many games are similar to the one gracing these pages. The original *Metal Gear* series, obviously: its MSX2 progenitor and NES conversion, the sequels *Snake's Revenge* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, and *Ghost Babel* on Game Boy Color. If you're an MSX fan you might add: *D-Dash*, *Jagur*, *Super Rambo Special* and *War Of The Dead 2*. Outside of the MSX maybe *Die Hard* on NES or *Alien 3* on Game Boy. A few others. Early *Metal Gear* games are basically early *Zelda* games but with guns; curiously while there have been countless *Zelda* copycats, with their Tolkienesque settings, the same cannot be said for Hideo Kojima's futuristic masterpiece. So to have – finally – a game like *UnMetal*, it is a glorious triumph.

We posed this conundrum to *UnMetal*'s creator, Francisco Téllez de Meneses. "I'm afraid I never played any *Zelda*, so I can't tell you, but the first two *Metal Gear* games were some of the best in the MSX scene. Also I'm afraid I had MSX1 so I could not play the other games mentioned. I tried *Super Rambo Special*, but I didn't like it very much. I create 2D games because my game engine specialises in 2D using 3D techniques. So I can create games like *Unepic* or *UnMetal*. In my opinion, the easiness to create 3D games, plus the fact that 2D seems 'old-fashioned', encourages other devs to create their games in 3D."

Another revelation regarding influences is when reading interviews with Fran, where he's been asked repeatedly about *Metal Gear Solid* on PlayStation, and he explains he never played the 3D versions. Does there need to be a better understanding of videogame history? "Absolutely," agrees Fran. "The story itself has nothing to do with the *Metal Gear* series. Of course there can be similarities, but they are just coincidences, as in a military base there are the typical clichés of a tank, helicopter and so on. The game is not trying to compete against the *Metal Gear* series at all. Kojima's ópera prima is hard to equal, especially for a humble indie dev like me. I'm not worried at all. The game has a lot of humour, so people are not thinking of *UnMetal* as a *Metal Gear* but as a '*Metal Gear* Parody.'"

For something described as a mere parody a lot of effort went into every aspect of *UnMetal*. The animation is fluid, detailed and accurate – when carrying a guard there is none of the cheap sprite mirroring you see in older games. Said unconscious guard will appear correctly slung over Jesse's right-hand shoulder regardless of which direction he faces. Just how

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** VERSUS EVIL

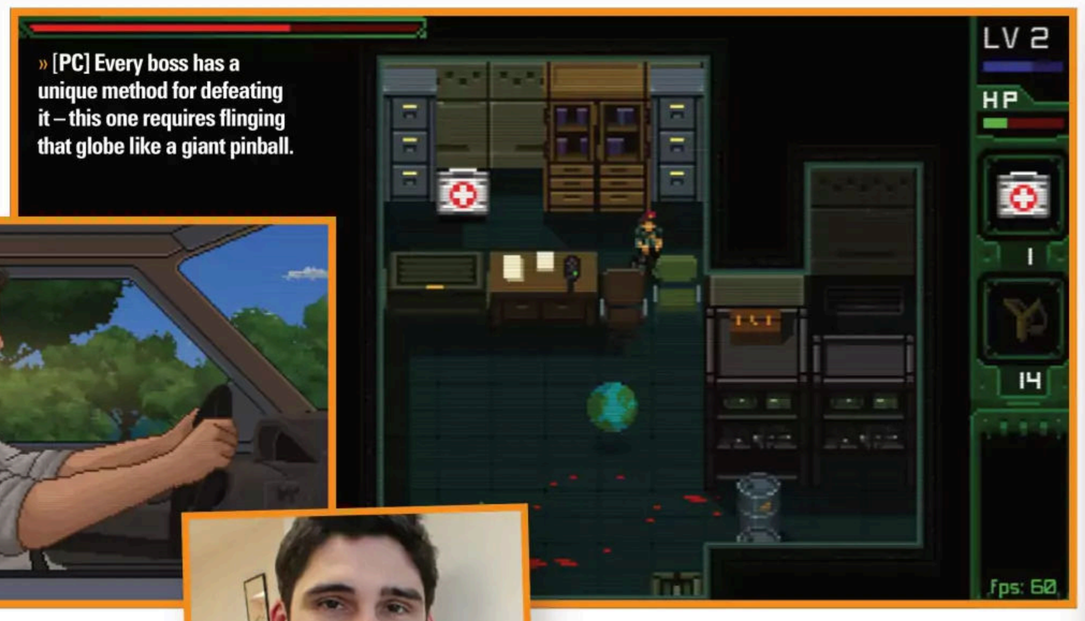
» **DEVELOPER:** @UNEPIC_FRAN

» **RELEASE:** OUT NOW

» **PLATFORM:** PC, PS4, XBOX ONE, NINTENDO SWITCH

» **GENRE:** STEALTH ACTION ADVENTURE

» [PC] "Jesse Fox, and Sarah who appears in level 2, were taken from a previous project called *Afraid Project* that unfortunately did not succeed on its kickstarter campaign," explains Fran.



» [PC] Every boss has a unique method for defeating it – this one requires flinging that globe like a giant pinball.

many unique frames of animation did they make? "A lot!" laughs Fran. "Jesse has 849 frames spread over 210 animations. If we count all the frames from character animations, we have a total amount of 3,385 frames. After finishing *Unepic* I was so fed up of doing pixel art that I promised myself I would hire someone to create the graphics for my next games. Marcel Greses created all the graphics in *UnMetal*, and Jose Jaime Hidalgo is the composer who did the OST. The vast majority of 'man hours' fell on me and Marcel. Marcel worked full-time for a year and a half, and I've also been working full-time on the project for three years."

» The man behind the Unepic label and *UnMetal*: Francisco Téllez de Meneses

Three years is a long time to spend on one project; a lot of time to generate content that might not get used.

"Well, I don't start a project having a collection of ideas and then create the game," explains Fran when asked about the cutting-room floor. "On the contrary, I tend to start the game and I keep inventing situations while doing it. So all ideas are inserted the same day or the next day. Luckily, in this project I didn't have to remove any ideas due to lack of time."

And what a lot of ideas they were! Reusable items with multiple functions, equipment crafting, diverse weapons, distinct bosses, clever environmental puzzles and even dynamic scenario changes depending on how players answer questions! One particularly ingenious aspect is that guards must never be killed. If players forgo using chloroform in favour of bullets to shoot enemies, they then need to spend a precious medkit on each so they don't die. It adds a delicate risk/reward layer to the existing stealth. But with such a rich set of complex interlocking systems, how did Fran fine-tune the balancing so expertly? Although challenging, there's never any unfair difficulty spikes.

"That was easy," smiles Fran, as he reveals his secret technique. "I just counted the seconds I needed to pass certain parts, and added 30 more seconds. In that way I made sure anyone could do it. Of course the player needs to know the way and may fail the first time if getting lost, but it would never be hard once you know the way."

As shown at the beginning of this article, there are few games that provide this particular repertoire of qualia, so we asked Fran about releasing a level editor for user-created scenarios. "It's easy to create issues and bugs by using the editor. As I was the one editing all scenarios, I didn't prepare the editor for situations I was not going to do, like placing characters or items in the wrong places. All events are hard-coded, so I would need to add event 'triggers'. To release the editor would need a LOT of work. There may be a chance, but it's not a big focus."

Then what about a sequel? "I'm very happy with the final result of the game and, although I never did a sequel to my previous games, if this is successful there is a chance. I enjoyed making *UnMetal* and I'm pretty sure I would enjoy doing a sequel."

» [PC] We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow sub… (That's it, you're fired – Ed.)

» [PC] Chloroform is the best way to dispatch guards – silent and not at all deadly.

PROTOTYPE ON MSX1

Before UnMetal there was Prisoner Of War

■ Announced and released towards the end of 2018, *Prisoner Of War* for the original MSX1 is basically the proof of concept for *UnMetal* on modern systems. You won't find a digital download of this prototype, since it was sold exclusively on physical cartridge. Developed by Francisco Téllez de Meneses, this was not his first project coding for original hardware – previously he'd programmed *Ghost* for MSX1 in assembler.

"One day I posted a poll on Twitter," recalls Fran, "asking people what they would like me to create next for the MSX – an 8-bit computer from the Eighties. A *Metal Gear*-like for MSX1 was by far the most voted option."

Here it's important to differentiate the models of MSX, since the MSX1 to the MSX2 is like the PlayStation to the PS2. Fran describes his reasoning for choosing the MSX1 was partly wish fulfilment from his youth, "The first *Metal Gear* was created for MSX2 computers 35 years ago and children like me that had an MSX1 could not enjoy it. I discovered the system at school. I was 13 and we had our first computer class ever. It was full of MSX computers. Typing something on the keyboard and seeing it on a TV was pure magic. Later I found out that typing certain stuff you could create circles and lines. First thing I did at home was to ask for a MSX computer for my birthday. Then creating games became my hobby, and years later my job."

STEVE MERETZKY

Infocom was a pioneer of the text adventure, and among its talented designers – 'Implementers' – was Steve Meretzky. From working with Douglas Adams to the minefield of mobile gaming, he looks back on his lengthy career

Words by Andrew Fisher

Comedy played a key role in Steve's games, so what shaped his sense of humour? "Many things. Certainly, Warner Brothers cartoons, which were a Saturday morning staple in our household. *Monty Python*. Early Woody Allen. *Saturday Night Live*. Just to name a few," says Steve. He took quite a circuitous route to becoming a game designer, having gone to the Massachusetts Institute Of Technology (MIT) to study architecture (with a minor in creative writing, which would come in handy). After his years at Infocom, Steve became a consultant and worked freelance with other publishers before founding Boffo Games. A string of bad luck led him into casual gaming, but he can look back on many fondly remembered titles.

Photos by permission of Steve Meretzky

» A publicity photo of Douglas Adams and Steve Meretzky from 1984.

How did you end up testing games for Infocom?
I was involved in the movie and lecture group at MIT (the Lecture Series Committee), where I became friends with many of the initial founders of Infocom. After graduation, I was working for a construction company, and not enjoying it. I was sharing an apartment with Mike Dornbrook, Infocom's sole game tester. When Mike went off to Chicago to go to business school, Marc Blank needed a new tester, so he chose the next best person in our apartment, which was me.

How long did it take to go from tester to Imp (Implementer) while you were there?
About a year, though it was a gradual transition. My first work for Infocom was testing *Deadline* in November of '81. I started writing *Planetfall* around September of '82, but I kept testing games throughout most of the time that I was writing *Planetfall* (which was released in the fall of '93).

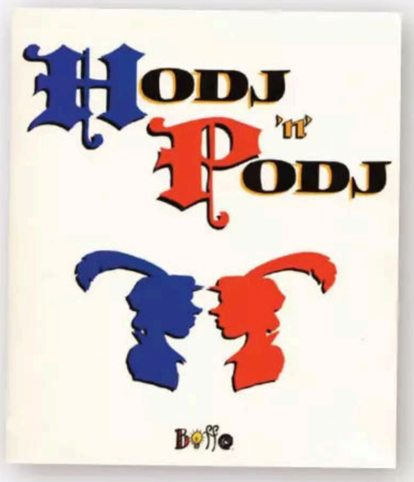
What inspired your first game *Planetfall*, and its legendary robot Floyd?
There had been characters in Infocom games before… the thief in *Zork I*, the wizard in *Zork II*, the many suspects in *Deadline*. But there hadn't been much focus on a single 'sidekick' character. I thought that, with such a focus, the character could be a little deeper and more interesting. Beyond that, I was also most interested in science fiction as a genre, and Dave Lebling's *Starcross* (at that point, Infocom's only science fiction title) had been my favourite Infocom game to date.

You created the second game in the *Enchanter* trilogy, *Sorcerer*. Did it feel different creating a more traditional fantasy adventure game?
A game with magic is pretty liberating, since magic can do pretty much whatever you want it to do, and it doesn't have to make sense… it's magic! Beyond that, not too different. And it was a sequel, so there was a lot less world-building needed than when I created *Planetfall*.

Was there much collaboration and co-operation between the Imps?
Oh yes, quite a bit. We all played each other's games at a fairly early stage and gave lots of feedback. And we met weekly for an 'Imp's lunch' where we'd talk through any problems anyone was having.

When did you learn you would be working with Douglas Adams on *Hitchhiker's*?
It was probably toward the end of my time on *Sorcerer*, as I was wrapping up the game. Probably late January or early February of 1984. Douglas was most interested in collaborating with Marc Blank, as the head Imp, but he wasn't interested, for whatever reason. He asked me, because I was just about to get freed up, and perhaps because *Planetfall* was the most *Hitchhiker's*-like of the Infocom games so far, and I said sure.

What was the working process like?
In February of '84, he came over to Massachusetts for a week, and we got the first part of the game done (through the arrival on the Vogon ship). Then he went back, and we were going to communicate via an early (pre-internet) version of email, requiring lots of fiddling with modems and other annoying stuff. But Douglas was a serious procrastinator (on all his projects, not just the *Hitchhiker's* game), and we'd made little progress by May. It was getting to the point that releasing the game in time for the Christmas '84 selling season was in danger.



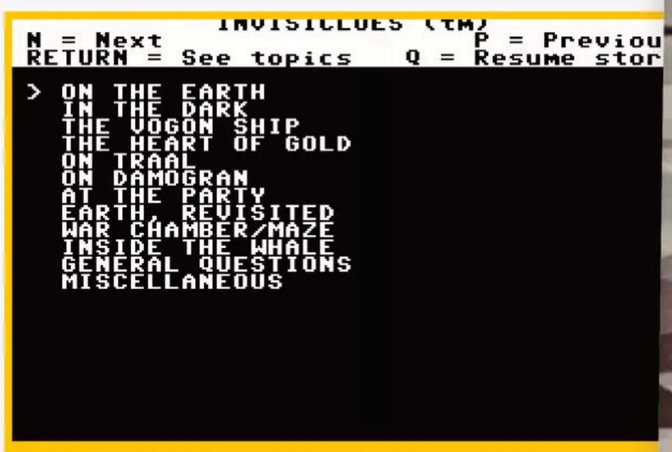
» The superior *Hodj 'N' Podj* cover that was never used.

> My first work for Infocom was testing Deadline in November of '81
>
> Steve Meretzky

» Steve Meretzky, with the foam letters from *Zork Zero*'s cover behind him.

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **PLANETFALL** [1983] VARIOUS
- **ZORK: A WHAT-DO-I-DO-NOW? GAME BOOKS** [1983-4] PAPERBACK
- **SORCERER** [1984] VARIOUS
- **THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY** [1984] VARIOUS
- **A MIND FOREVER VOYAGING** [1985] VARIOUS
- **LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS** [1986] VARIOUS
- **STATIONFALL** [1987] VARIOUS
- **ZORK ZERO** [1988] AMIGA, APPLE-II, MS-DOS, MACINTOSH
- **LANE MASTODON VS THE BLUBBERMEN** [1989] C64, APPLE-II, MS-DOS
- **SPELLCASTING 101: SORCERERS GET ALL THE GIRLS** [1990] DOS
- **SPELLCASTING 201: THE SORCERER'S APPLIANCE** [1991] DOS
- **LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS 2** [1991] DOS
- **SPELLCASTING 301: SPRING BREAK** [1992] DOS
- **REX NEBULAR AND THE COSMIC GENDER BENDER** [1992] DOS, MACINTOSH (ADVISORY CAPACITY)
- **SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN** [1994] DOS, MACINTOSH, WINDOWS
- **HODJ 'N' PODJ** [1994] DOS
- **COLUMBO'S MYSTERY CAPERS** [1994] NEWTON (CONSULTING ROLE)
- **ULTIMATE YAHTZEE** [1996] WINDOWS
- **DISNEY'S HADES CHALLENGE** [1996] WINDOWS, MACINTOSH (CONSULTANT)
- **THE SPACE BAR** [1997] WINDOWS, MACINTOSH
- **WARCRAFT ADVENTURES: LORD OF THE CLANS** [1998, CANCELLED] WINDOWS (CONSULTANT)
- **ESCAPE FROM PLANET Z** [1998] ONLINE (CONSULTANT)
- **SINISTAR UNLEASHED** [1999] WINDOWS (CONSULTANT)
- **SOLITAIRE RUSH** [2000] ONLINE
- **JIGSAW GENIUS** [2000] ONLINE
- **PENCIL WARS** [2000] ONLINE
- **TILE CITY** [2000] ONLINE
- **BRICKOUT** [2001] ONLINE
- **WORD CUBES** [2001] ONLINE
- **SHAPETRIS** [2001] ONLINE
- **PICTURE PERFECT** [2002] ONLINE
- **PRESS YOUR BUCK** [2002] ONLINE
- **HANGMANIA** [2002] ONLINE
- **CATCH-21** [2002] ONLINE
- **SWAPIT!** [2003] ONLINE
- **BLOCKWERX** [2004] ONLINE
- **TRIV!** [2004] ONLINE
- **SKILLGAMMON** [2004] ONLINE
- **HAUNTED MINE** [2004] ONLINE
- **PAINT BUCKETS** [2005] ONLINE
- **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN MULTIPLAYER** [2006] MOBILE
- **ROYAL FLUSH** [2006] ONLINE
- **DAYCARE NIGHTMARE** [2007] iOS, PC
- **MOBSTERS: OVERDRIVE** [2008] ONLINE
- **SORORITY LIFE** [2008] FACEBOOK, MYSPACE
- **MOBSTERS 2: VENDETTA** [2009] ONLINE
- **SOCIAL CITY** [2010] ONLINE
- **ESPN U: COLLEGE TOWN** [2011] ONLINE
- **GARDENS OF TIME** [2011] ONLINE
- **ESPN SPORTS BAR** [2012] ONLINE
- **GSN CASINO** [2013] ONLINE
- **GSN GRAND CASINO** [2015] ONLINE



» [C64] The *Solid Gold* edition of *Hitchhiker's* had the Invisiclues built in.

» Steve at a 1984 press conference for *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*.

In the meantime, Douglas had been exiled by his agent to a country inn four hours west of London, to finish [the novel] *So Long And Thanks For All The Fish*, which was 13 months late and counting. Infocom sent me there, to a town called Huntsham that was so tiny, its mailing address was Huntsham nr Tiverton (nr meaning near). During that week, we finished the design, and I headed back home to implement it in five crunch-y weeks. In September, Douglas came back over for final edits and polishes, and the game launched in time for the big Christmas selling season.

Were you trying things that would stretch the Infocom system?
Most of those were Douglas' ideas. Like having the game lie to you. Or having an inventory item like 'no tea'. Or an input that caused a parser failure being the words that fell through a wormhole in the universe and caused the interstellar war.

Looking back to the notorious Babel Fish puzzle, what would you have done differently?
About the only thing I'd do differently is make sure that a player couldn't get off the Earth without having taken the junk mail. Other than that, I think it's a hard but fair puzzle, and its very hardness made the puzzle (and thus the game) a little more culty. But having to restart, if you'd failed to take the junk mail, is poor game design.

Did you do much work with the publishing side of the Infocom business?
I wrote a lot of the articles for the *New Zork Times* (later called *The Status Line*, after the *New York Times* sent threatening letters). I was also the puzzle editor and the cartoon editor. And I wrote the Invisiclues for all my own games, as well as a few of the other early games.

» Glittering prizes in the Infocom trophy cabinet.

How did you get the task of creating four *Zork: A What-Do-I-Do-Now?* books for Tor Books – *The Forces Of Krill, The Malifestro Quest, The Cavern Of Doom* and *Conquest At Quendor*?
I don't have a strong recollection of how that was decided… whether I was asked, or volunteered, or what. But it was a fun project… decision books like those didn't tend to have 'right' or 'wrong' choices, but I wanted to have 'right' choices and a 'best' ending.

We are just ten years away from the 2031 setting of *A Mind Forever Voyaging* (*AMFV*). Did you set out to make a political game?
Absolutely. Reagan has just been re-elected, which was appalling enough, but had won in a landslide, which was doubly appalling. I thought interactive fiction games had incredible power, because you were always thinking about them even when you weren't playing, and that would then be leveraged to be a strong way to impart social and political messages.

***Leather Goddesses Of Phobos* was different again, with adult themes and a scratch 'n' sniff card. Was that fun, with its pastiche of sci-fi and sex?**
It was way fun to research the genre, way fun to design the game, and way fun to create the package elements. Coming off the long, very hard, very serious project of *AMFV*, it was a huge relief to do something that was such mindless fun. Writing the comic was a blast (it was Brian Moriarity's idea to make it a 3D comic). Picking the scents for the scratch 'n' sniff

» Steve beside the world's largest Boffo Games logo at the office.

card, out of 500 possible scents, was wild. Creating the different naughtiness levels for countless bits of text was insanely fun.

Did the Imps have ideas for the 'feelies', a key part of Infocom releases?
Most of the ideas came from us. Marc designed most of the detective's portfolio that accompanied *Deadline* (based on some old books we had with a similar concept). I had (still have) a folder with ideas for fun stuff, like that material which looks like thick cardboard, but then you drop it in water, and it turns into a sponge. One idea I had when we repackaged the *Zork Trilogy* was to have one-third of a jigsaw puzzle in each box… you'd have to buy the entire trilogy to complete the puzzle.

» Ron Cobb, designer of the classic *Star Wars* cantina scene, and Steve at the launch of *The Space Bar*.

> "Picking the scents for the scratch 'n' sniff card, out of 500 possible scents, was wild"
> Steve Meretzky

Were you happy to do the sequel *Stationfall*, and what did you bring new to it?
As with *Sorcerer*, it was easy to create a new game within an existing world. My idea was to go slightly darker with the sequel, but I don't want to go into any more detail because, well, spoilers.

HOW MANY TIMES HAS THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?
NOW SEE THE UNIVERSE THE SAFE, SURE, MONEY-SAVING WAY WITH THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY!
ORDER FOR DESTRUCTION
PASSPORT
To The United Products of Infocom
MICROSCOPIC SPACE FLEET
DON'T PANIC!

» The feelies inside *Hitchhiker's* included peril-sensitive sunglasses, a Don't Panic badge and demolition orders. [From Andrew Fisher's private collection]

You worked on *Zork Zero* and *Lane Mastodon Vs The Blubbermen*, which used a more visual approach. What did you make of this style?
With *Zork Zero*, we were starting to introduce graphic elements into our text games, to better compete with companies like Sierra and Lucasfilm who were doing nearly fully graphical games. But the addition of such graphics into *Zork Zero* were incidental; it was still a big, hard, puzzle-filled adventure game, and thus felt pretty similar to my previous efforts.

The Infocomix were pretty different. That was using an engine created by a different company (Tom Snyder Productions) and creating something like *Lane Mastodon Vs The Blubbermen* was perhaps a week or two of work, rather than a year of work. No one at Infocom was too excited about the Infocomix projects, but these were easy enough to put out without a lot of work that it seemed like a worthwhile experiment.

Activision/Mediagenic took over Infocom, did you notice a change in the atmosphere?
Activision took over Infocom in 1986, so *Leather Goddesses*, *Stationfall* and *Zork Zero* were all released post-Activision. Sales of text games were declining, and Activision wasn't happy. Plus, they were having their own internal issues with profitability, and Jim Levy was fired by their board. And the board appointed Bruce Davis as CEO, who had been against the Infocom acquisition from day one. It was Bruce Davis who sued all the founders of Infocom (many of whom continued to be key employees of Activision's Infocom division), thus destroying most of what remained of any Infocom morale. Finally, in May 1989, Activision shut down the Infocom office, but continued to make some Infocom-labelled projects out of the Activision office… most notably, several *Zork* sequels and a *Leather Goddess* sequel. (I also designed a third *Planetfall* game for them, which they never released.) These were pretty spotty efforts, with lots of different tones.

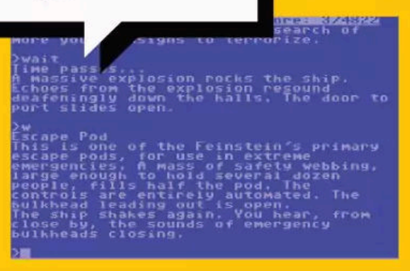
What inspired the *Spellcasting* series, and the very geeky magic student Ernie Eaglebeak?
Legend wanted something *Leather Goddesses*-like for its bawdy appeal. And I remembered how much fun magic and spellcasting had been when I designed *Sorcerer*. So, the result was *Spellcasting 101*. Probably a lot of influence from things like *Animal House* and *Revenge Of The Nerds*.

***Superhero League Of Hoboken* was pretty left field, with its 'useless' superheroes and RPG elements. Was it meant to be satirical as well as challenging?**
It was an attempt to inject humour into the RPG genre, which had always taken itself pretty seriously in my opinion. But Legend was still 100% an adventure game publisher and was reluctant ▶

images © Steve Meretzky

MERETZKY MAGIC

Key titles Steve was involved with


>wait
Time passes...
A massive explosion rocks the ship.
Echoes from the explosion resound deafeningly down the halls. The door to port slides open.
>w
Escape Pod
This is one of the Feinstein's primary escape pods, for use in extreme emergencies. A mass of safety webbing, large enough to hold several dozen people, fills half the pod. The controls are entirely automated. The bulkhead leading out is open.
The ship shakes again. You hear, from close by, the sounds of emergency bulkheads closing.

PLANETFALL

1983, Various

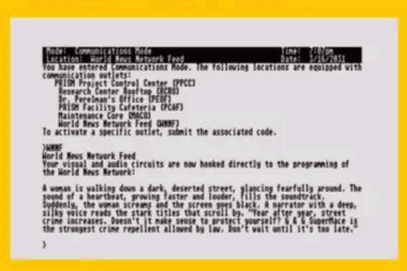
■ You start out mopping the deck of a spaceship and end up saving a planet – with a robot named Floyd at your side. Steve's first game has 41 different ways to die, so the later *Solid Gold* edition with its built-in hints is the best way to play. *Planetfall*'s popularity meant that a follow-up, *Stationfall* was released four years later. A remake appeared on the NEC PC-9801 in 1992.

Bedroom Score: 18/19
>examine pocket fluff
You see nothing special about pocket fluff.
Astoundingly, a bulldozer pokes through your wall. However, you have no time for surprise because the ceiling is collapsing on you as your home is unexpectedly demolished to make way for a new bypass. You are seriously injured in the process, but on your way to the hospital a fleet of Vogon Constructor Ships unexpectedly arrives and demolishes the Earth to make way for a new hyperspace bypass.
Better luck next life.
We are about to give you your score. Put on your peril-sensitive sunglasses now. (Hit RETURN or ENTER when ready.)

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

1984, Various

■ Douglas Adams was quoted as saying he wasn't sure which bits he had written, and which bits Steve wrote – a huge compliment for such a well-made adaptation. The boxed edition with its brilliant 'feelies' is worth tracking down for your collection, and it also had a *Solid Gold* re-release.


Location: World News Network Feed
You have entered Communications Mode. The following locations are equipped with communication outlets:
PRISM Project Control Center (PPCC)
Research Center Rooftop (RCRO)
Dr. Forelman's Office (PFOF)
PRISM Facility Cafeteria (PCAF)
Maintenance Core (MNCO)
World News Network Feed (WNNF)
To activate a specific outlet, submit the associated code.
>WNNF
World News Network Feed
Your visual and audio circuits are now hooked directly to the programming of the World News Network.
A woman is walking down a dark, deserted street, glancing fearfully around. The sound of a heartbeat, growing faster and louder, fills the soundtrack. Suddenly, the woman screams and the screen goes black. A narrator with a deep, silky voice reads the stark titles that scroll by. "Fear grips you, street crime increases. Doesn't it make sense to protect yourself? R & R Superface is the strongest crime repellent allowed by law. Don't wait until it's too late."

A MIND FOREVER VOYAGING

1985, Various

■ Once you get past the initial section and learn the codes for the sentient PRISM computer, this becomes an extremely deep and interesting adventure with its unusual political themes that still hold up well today. *Next Generation* magazine listed it as #66 in its Top 100 Games Of All-Time feature in 1996.

SPELLCASTING 101: SORCERERS GET ALL THE GIRLS

1990, DOS
(The Abyss engine)

■ With the trilogy available in a single cheap download on Good Old Games, it's easier than ever to get into the college antics of Ernie Eaglebeak. The interface, designed by Bob Bates for a cancelled Infocom title, allows you to type instructions or point-and-click with ease .

Superhero
LEAGUE
HOBOKEN
Amidst this backdrop, the Superhero Leagues have arisen, founded by folks whose mutations or bionic enhancements have given them Powers and Abilities Far Beyond Those of Mortal Men.

SUPERHERO LEAGUE OF HOBOKEN

1994, DOS

■ Also re-released through Good Old Games, this mixed in useless superheroes and light RPG elements with some truly bizarre missions – and has a lot to say about the state of the world right now. The point-and-click interface had developed further from the *Spellcasting* games and it's well worth investigating.

GLITTERING PRIZES

Steve on awards and high review scores

There have been many awards and high review scores in Steve's career, and Stanford University holds a dedicated archive of material (manuals, design documents and boxes). He was honoured to receive the BAFTA for the 20th anniversary interactive edition of *Hitchhiker's*. This was updated with graphics for each location made by fans and updated once =more for the 30th anniversary. It is still playable online at bbc.in/3nnr4dj.

"That was a really nice surprise," says Steve. "Even though a number of people were involved in porting the game to the web, situated in several countries, they only gave us one statuette. So, we decided we'd each keep it for a few months (and while we had it, take photos of it in various places). Then Jane, Douglas' widow, would be the final recipient."

But it was fan feedback that Steve valued more. "Of all my games, *A Mind Forever Voyaging* is by far the one where people have come up to me and said some variation of 'Playing *AMFV* is what made me decide to get into the game industry' or '*AMFV* convinced me that I wanted to be a game designer.' So that's probably what has meant the most to me."

» Steve and the BAFTA award recreate the bulldozer scene from *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy...*

THE ADVENTURES OF
LANE MASTODON
IN THRILLING 3-D!
#91
INFOCOMIX
5¢
WHEN I DEACTIVATE THE FORCE-SHIELD, THE HYPER-SNAKE WILL DEVOUR THE SENATOR ... AND THEN YOU, LANE!
LANE battles the SHAMELESS LEATHER GODD

» Lane Mastodon took on the *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* in the 3D comic/manual.

to go 100% into the RPG genre, and that's how it ended up as that sort of RPG adventure game hybrid.

Leather Goddesses Of Phobos 2 moved to a point-and-click style, how do you think the sequel compares?

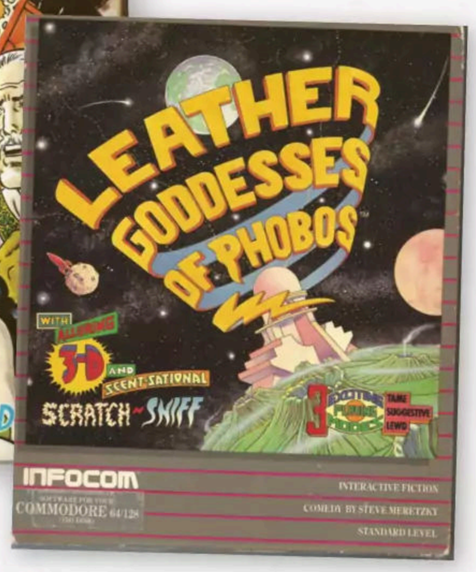
It was pretty much a mess of a project throughout. Activision was going through bankruptcy over the course of development. I remember getting cheques from them, and where it would normally say 'Activision' in the upper-left corner of the cheque, it would say something like 'Inventory Liquidation Fund'. It's amazing that the game came out at all. But I've never been nearly as big a fan of point-and-click adventures as of parser-driven adventures, and *LGOP2* wasn't anything close to a great example of the former.

What prompted you to start Boffo Games?

For the five years since Infocom's demise, I'd just been making games for other companies on a contract basis, working from home. I missed having more control, and I missed working in a creative office environment. At the time, CD-ROM games were just taking off, and there were a lot of new companies (book publishers, movie studios, etc) throwing money at CD-ROM game makers. So along with two other MIT friends (Mike Dornbrook and Leo DaCosta), we started Boffo.

Hodj 'N' Podj is a mixture of board game and story, how did you come up with it?

I actually first designed it toward the end of my time at Infocom. I was lamenting that – as games became bigger and more complex – there were all sorts of simple game experiences that were no longer feasible: simple arcade games like *Space Invaders*, solitaire games, word games, parlour games like backgammon, etc. Stuff I had loved doing on computers seven or eight years earlier, but the market didn't allow for anymore. (Remember, at this point, there was only one way to make money on games: put them in a box and sell them in a retail store for $40-ish.) So, my idea was a game that combined a lot of these simple games into one game, and the board game idea was the structure that held them all together. After founding Boffo, we pitched (if I recall correctly) 19 ideas to MediaVision, including *Hodj 'N' Podj*, and that was the one they liked best, so we started building it. It was basically a casual game at a point when the casual game market didn't yet exist (and, in fact, the term 'casual game' was probably still five plus years away from actually being coined).



» The cover of *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos*, naming Steve Meretzky as the author and rating it Standard difficulty.

Were you shocked by the MediaVision financial scandal?

Shocked, stunned, dismayed... We'd signed a contract with them for *Hodj 'N' Podj* and were negotiating a five-game contract to follow that. We'd signed a lease for office space based on the prospect of that multi-game contract. MediaVision has posted a profit of $30 million... then suddenly it was revealed that they'd been cooking the books and had to restate their earnings as negative $120 million. Within a head-spinning several weeks, their management was not just gone but under criminal investigation, the company was in Chapter 11, and our game was being sold off in bankruptcy court.

> "After founding Boffo, we pitched 19 ideas to MediaVision, including Hodj 'N' Podj, and that was the one they liked best"
> Steve Meretzky

So what happened to your games?

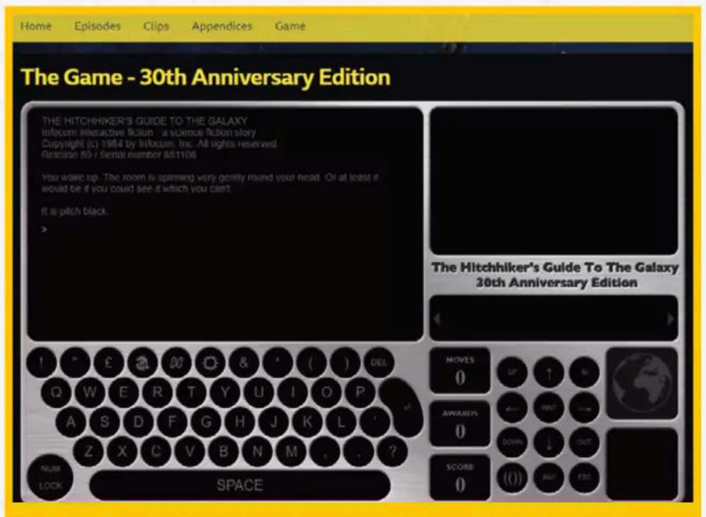
All the MediaVision games were bought by Virgin Interactive, and they had absolutely no idea what to do with *Hodj 'N' Podj*. They took the (in my opinion, fantastic) box that MediaVision's creative group had designed, threw it away, and created the World's Worst Ever Retail Box for the game. The cover that MediaVision designed was photographed to look like the box was wrapped in white satin cloth. We had a mock-up of the package, and you could just put it on a store shelf, and it would jump out like crazy from across the room. You could watch people just gravitate to it like moths to a light bulb. Whereas the Virgin Interactive cover was incredible for the way the eye would just slide away from it. That package cover should be used to coat a stealth bomber; it would never be seen.

What was it like working with Ron Cobb on _The Space Bar_, and were you disappointed that it failed commercially?

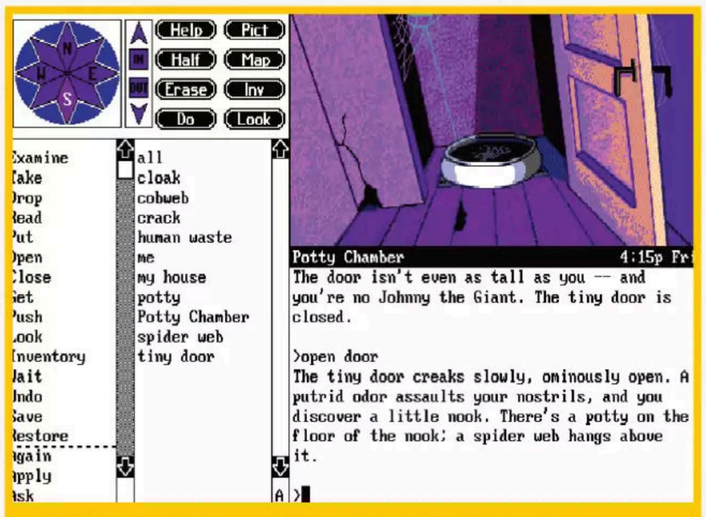
It was terrific... he was so talented and such a great person. It was the entire reason we went with Rocket Science as the publisher, even though the company had some obvious snake-oil salesmen among their founders. Of course, I'm disappointed about its sales... a huge amount of work went into it, and we pretty much bet the company (Boffo) on it doing well.

You moved into 'casual' games, working with WorldWinner, Playdom and King. What have been your highlights and favourite games in this period of your career?

WorldWinner was fascinating, basically inventing online tournament gaming, which also involved inventing free-to-play gaming and all its attendant systems (virtual currencies, user acquisition funnels, live ops, metrics-driven design, etc). When I started there, I figured I'd be there maybe one-



» [Web] The 30th anniversary interactive edition of *Hitchhiker's* is still available through the BBC website.



» [PC] What could the 'small room' off the side of Ernie Eaglebeak's dorm be? Ah, of course.

and-a-half years, at which point either the company would be out of business, or we'd all be fabulously rich. Of course, neither turned out to be the case, but I ended up staying five years. The two things that made it interesting: (1) figuring out how to remove all the luck from games without destroying what made them fun; and (2) with cash payouts on the line, figuring out how to make games reasonably cheat-proof.

Playdom was a wild ride, with the company going from about 15 people to 600, but my favourite part was the last two years, where we started a studio to build a Disney park-building game, *Disney's Dream Kingdom*. Think *CityVille* but building a theme park instead of a generic city. It was a fantastic game, and Playdom management shut it down on the cusp of completion. Too long a story to go into here, but probably the best team and the best development experience I've ever had, except for the brutal ending.

You were a consultant on the cancelled *Warcraft Adventures: Lord Of The Clans*. What happened?
They had a fully playable version of the game and didn't think it was quite up to the quality level of Lucasfilm games. They wanted to tweak the puzzles and the narrative a bit but didn't want to invest a whole lot more money into it. I just spent a week brainstorming with the team, and then another week or two writing design docs. Shortly thereafter they decided that the game was unsavable, and they killed it.

Have you had many games cancelled, and which one hurt the most?
See *Disney's Dream Kingdom*. But that is just the most painful of many, many games that failed to launch. Another major example is an MMO that I spent the better part of a year designing for THQ, circa 1999. They were envious of the success of *Ultima Online* and wanted one. Rather than design a clone of that, I set it within a Japanese mythos rather than a European one.

The Infocom hard drives revealed what remains of *Milliways*, the adaptation of the Douglas Adams novel *The Restaurant At The End Of The Universe*. Can you remember how the game was progressing?
I was busy with *Zork Zero*. A number of other people worked on the project, but Douglas was pretty sick of *Hitchhiker's* by that point, and the game never went very far from the starting line.

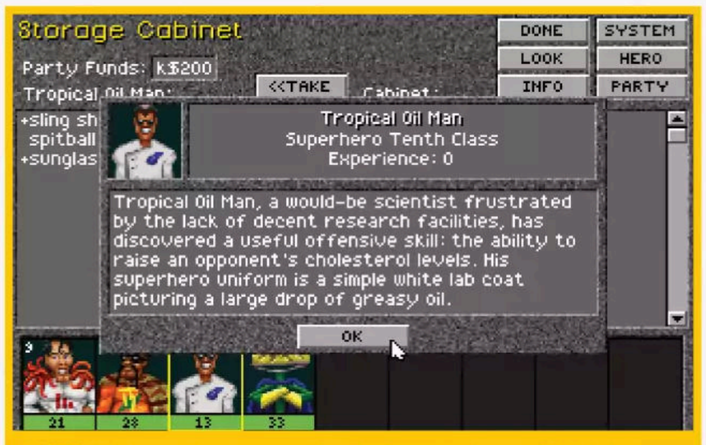
There are some private emails that never should have been released, at least not without explicit permission from the parties involved. Beyond that, I'm very glad to have all this archival material out in public, especially the source code.

Is there a game or design you want to finish?
I was working on an idea for a Titanic game at the time that Infocom shut down. Also, the *Spellcasting* series was always meant to be a quadrilogy (because, four years of college) but sales of *201* and *301* didn't justify the final game (which was going to be called *Spellcasting 401: The Graduation Balls*).

Would you ever use the old Infocom game engines to create a new game?
If I was going to create a text adventure today, I'd probably use TADS [Text Adventure Development System]. But I think that Bob Bates' recent experience with launching *Thaumistry* has proven that there's still not much of a market these days for text adventures, and if I'm going to do something low-paying just for the creative satisfaction, I think I'd rather write books than text adventures. ✱

Thanks to Steve for allowing us to use his excellent photos.

» [C64] Lane Mastodon has radio trouble early in the game but receives the important distress call from Earth.



» [PC] Clicking on the party members in *Superhero League Of Hoboken* reveals hilarious descriptions, such as this one of Tropical Oil Man.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

NorthWay: Was the commercial death of Interactive Fiction (IF) inevitable? Could it have survived, and what do you see as its successor?

Yes, I think it was inevitable. In the first half of the Eighties, parser-driven text adventures were simply the coolest game you could make on a home computer. But by the late-Eighties, that was no longer true. The existence of the hobbyist IF market has demonstrated that there continues to be a niche for IF, but not a large enough niche to support you [if] doing it for profit rather than passion.

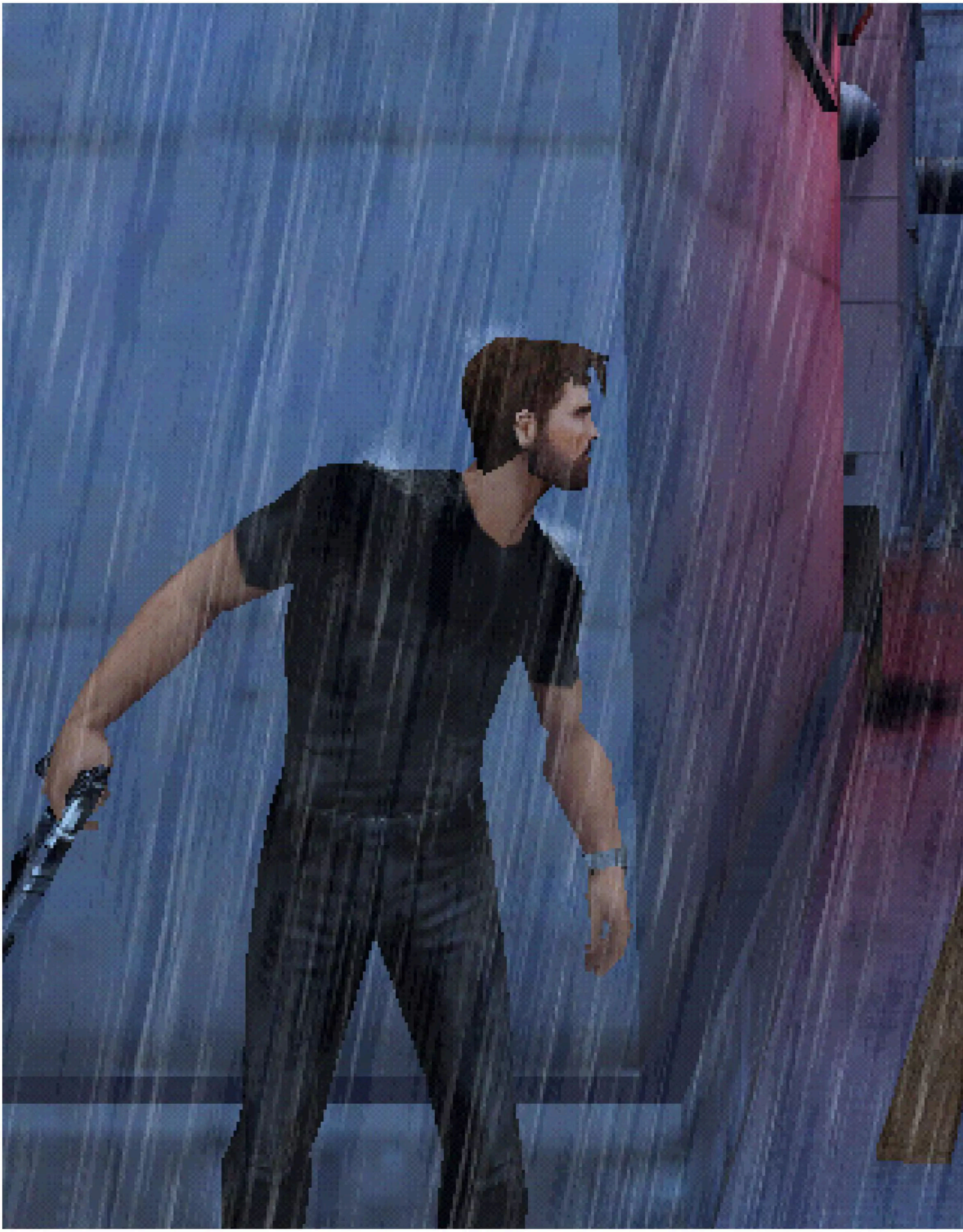
IF had two main components: narrative and puzzles. Narrative 'graduated' from IF and has found its way into virtually every genre of electronic games, from console-based shooters to casual mobile puzzle games. Puzzles ('brain teasers', not jigsaw/crossword puzzles), don't have as obvious a descendant or descendants… actually, I think the place where that experience can best be found today is escape rooms!

Antiriad2097: When writing *Hitchhiker's*, did you cut anything that expanded on the book?

No, nothing I can think of. The game was made on such a tight schedule, we didn't have time to design anything other than what we absolutely needed to get the game done. I'm sure there must have been some super-nascent ideas that never went anywhere, but I can't recall a single example.

RichL: What were your opinions of Magnetic Scrolls?

The Imps were always very impressed with Magnetic Scrolls. There was a constant stream of competitors that were trying to 'beat' us at the text adventure game. In the early Eighties, there was a company at the other end of Cambridge, Massachusetts (Kendall Square) called Spinnaker, which laid out big bucks to make deals with a bunch of big-name authors (Ray Bradbury, Michael Crichton, etc) which has us worried at first, until they were released. Some of these were more collaborative relationships than others, but all were universally terrible. Synapse Software released one or more IF games with a much-ballyhooed parser they called 'BTZ' (Better Than *Zork*). It wasn't. But Magnetic Scrolls was the first time we thought that anyone was making games that were parser-wise or writing-wise on a par with what we were doing. We were also on good terms with them and hung out at trade shows.



Headhunter

"JACK WADE, AS I LIVE AND BREATHE..."

RETROREVIVAL

» DREAMCAST » 2001 » AMUZE

One of the criticisms often directed at the Dreamcast was that its games could be a bit shallow. Many of the system's prominent games were arcade conversions and while some of them added substantial extra content, plenty didn't. Was Sega blind to market trends for more substantial experiences? I'd argue that it wasn't – the company threw resources at meaty games, they just arrived too late to make a difference. Games like *Phantasy Star Online* and *Metropolis Street Racer* are evidence enough of that, and *Headhunter* was just as ambitious.

This stealth action game is set in a near future dystopia, but one that's strikingly different to the dystopia we've actually ended up with. Law enforcement has been privatised, criminals are having control chips forcibly implanted into their brains and the TV news is telling you "all you need to know". That doesn't sound like a brilliant time, and it only gets worse. You're playing as Jack Wade, an amnesiac who wakes up in hospital to learn that his boss at the Anti-Crime Network has been murdered and he's out of a job. Returning to work as a freelance bounty hunter, he's approached by the daughter of his former boss, who wants him to track down the killer.

Headhunter is a graphical showcase for the Dreamcast, and the soundtrack by Richard Jacques is absolutely excellent. The game's story features some genuinely amusing dialogue and well-directed cutscenes, and features twists right to the very end. It's a well-designed game too. The *Metal Gear Solid* influence is obvious, leading to solid implementation of stealth and very satisfying combat, and there are some good puzzles in the style of *Resident Evil*. But like so much with the Dreamcast, *Headhunter* fans were left with a sense of unfulfilled potential. The original plans called for Jack to receive optional side missions while riding between main objectives on his motorbike, and there would even be online motorbike racing. It's still a very good game that's worth your time, but had these features not fallen victim to deadlines and budget constraints, it might well have been something more. ✱

» There's lots to cover this issue. We put the Evercade VS though its paces, investigate the GB Operator and discover if Resident Evil 4 VR is worth playing on the Oculus Quest 2

» The Evercade VS has an attractive retro look to it, with a modern light bar beneath the cartridge slot lid.

Evercade VS

IS THIS A VICTORIOUS SYSTEM, OR SHOULD YOU BE VERY SUSPICIOUS?

INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** 8 DECEMBER
- **PRICE:** £89.99 (STARTER PACK) / £109.99 (PREMIUM PACK)
- **PUBLISHER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

More than one company has promised a unique hardware platform dedicated to retro gaming, but none had truly proven the concept to be viable until the release of the Evercade handheld last year. While it certainly wasn't perfect, the system represented an affordable way to buy retro games, and has established itself enough that we now have the Evercade VS. The home console version of the Evercade runs the same cartridges as the handheld (bar two), but offers a host of improvements – most prominently, the ability to connect four controllers for multiplayer games.

It's a fairly small piece of hardware, just a little wider than its control pads, with a pleasing retro aesthetic. It's also a very simple machine – other than the four USB ports, you'll find a power button, a full size HDMI port and a micro USB power port. The system comes with a micro USB cable for power, but you'll have to supply a plug adaptor and HDMI cable yourself. The system features two cartridge slots, allowing you to have a large number of games ready to go, and you can even unlock secret games by inserting two related cartridges. All of the ones we've found so far have been nice bonuses, rather than must-haves. When you turn the system on you'll be able to set up a Wi-Fi connection, which right now is simply a way of enabling easy firmware updates.

The included control pads look and feel a lot like the handheld. The main difference is a second set of shoulder buttons that are satisfyingly clicky, but in a different way to those of the handheld. You get one pad with the starter pack and two with the premium pack, and additional controllers are available for £19.99. You can also map your own USB controllers in the system menu, and plenty of controllers will work this way, though some won't. Our Switch Pro Controller wasn't recognised at all, and one of our wired Switch controllers seemed to have some issues even after mapping. It's also possible to connect the Evercade handheld via a dedicated cable, but we haven't been able to test this function yet.

Regardless of which system you buy, *Technos Arcade 1* accompanies it and provides a good selection of eight games, mostly beat-'em-ups,

BRIEF HISTORY

» Blaze Entertainment launched the Evercade range in May 2020, with the aim of providing an affordable way to buy officially licensed retro games. The handheld console launched with a range of multi-game cartridges retailing for £14.99 each, featuring retro console games from Namco, Atari, Data East and others. Modern independent retro games were also represented on cartridges like the *Mega Cat Studios Collection 1*. The software library has since expanded with collections from publishers such as Codemasters, and the Evercade VS home console will launch alongside the first arcade game collections for Evercade, representing Technos, Data East, Atari and Gaelco.

» [Evercade VS] *Data East Arcade 1* is the stronger of the two carts in the premium pack.

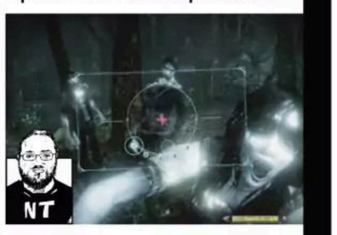
» [Evercade VS] Vertically oriented games look fine with the existing modes, but a tate mode would have been nice.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Puzzle Bobble VR: Vacation Odyssey

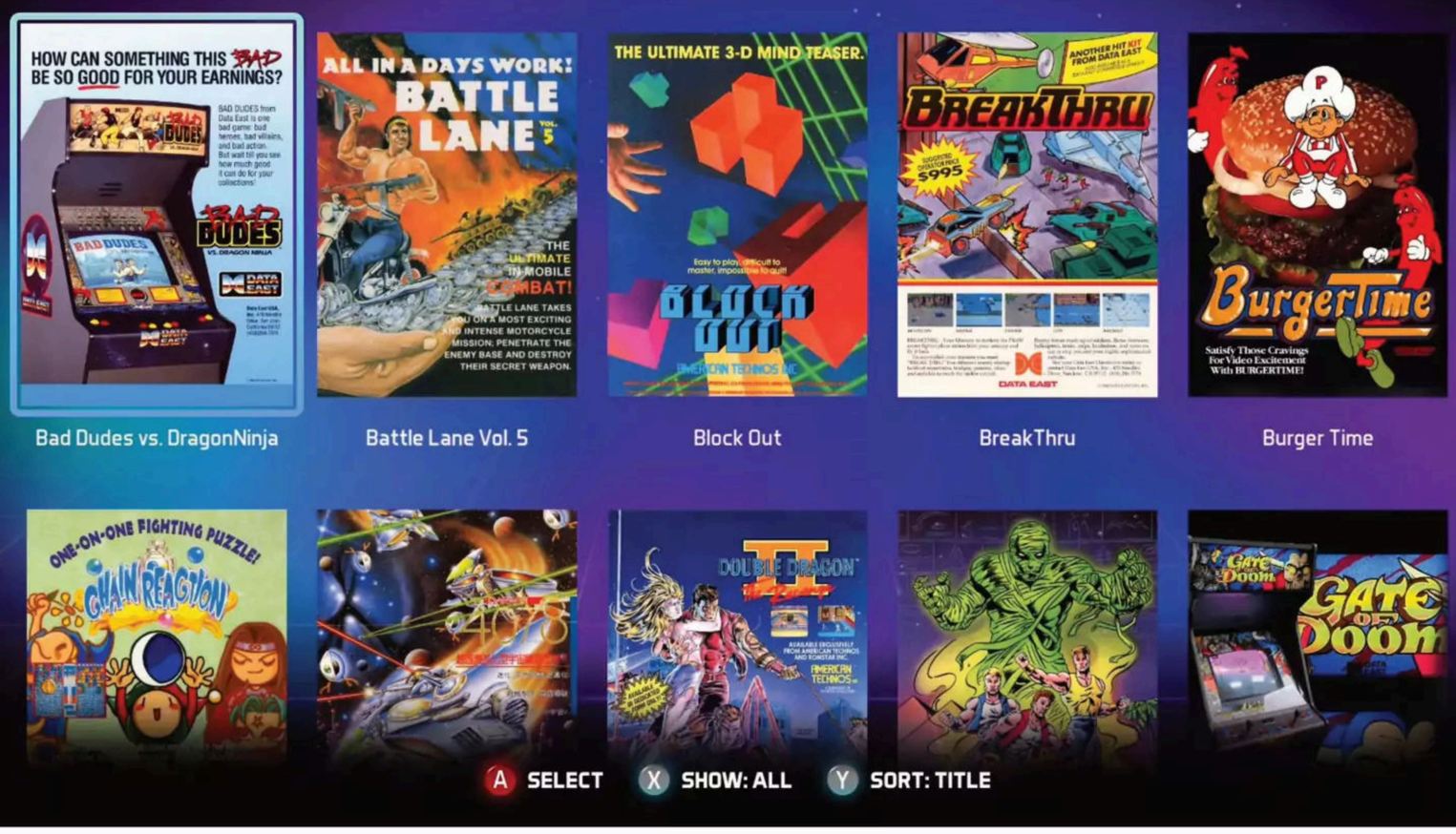
Aside from playing Resi 4 on the Quest 2, I've also been enjoying this slick update of Taito's puzzler.



NICK

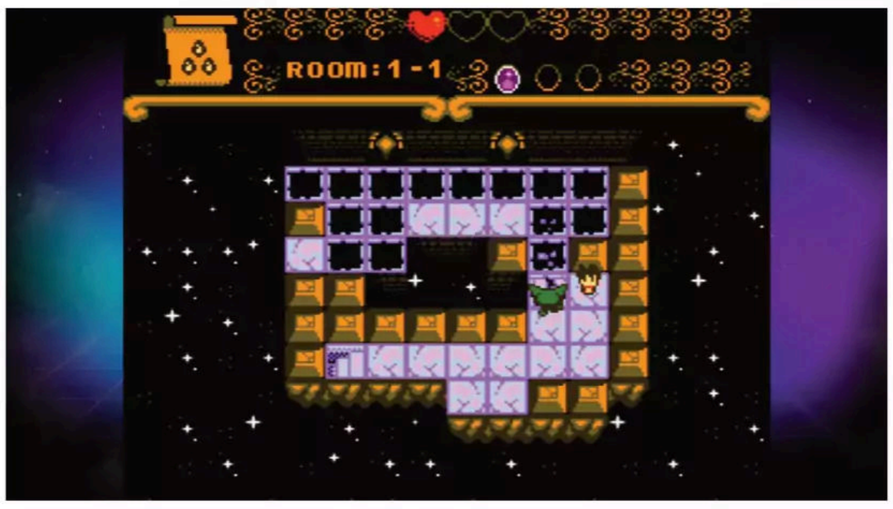
Project Zero: Maiden Of Black Water

With ghosts rather than zombies for foes, this was the perfect game for me during spooky season.



»[Evercade VS] The new menu system resembles that of mini consoles, in that it's cleanly laid out and very easy to use.

»[Evercade VS] The scanline options are a nice addition – if these look too much, there's a less intense setting.



»[Evercade VS] *Mega Cat Studios Collection 2* demonstrates that Evercade buyers should be open to new favourites.

We prefer the *Data East Arcade 1* cartridge that comes with the premium pack due to the greater variety of its ten games. They make for a decent start, but buying additional cartridges is key to the Evercade experience and the ability to play multiplayer games does massively increase the entertainment value of some cartridges, particularly *Codemasters Collection 1* and *Technos Collection 1*.

Games are displayed at 1080p and you have the option to display in original aspect ratio, pixel perfect or full-screen modes, but there's no tate mode for vertically oriented arcade games. There are also optional bezels, and two scanline settings. What's a little disappointing is that despite the options, many games still have a soft, filtered look and there's no way to get sharp pixels. Still, they're easy to access and can be changed mid-game. In fact, the Evercade VS system software is a slick front end that can give any mini console a run for its money. The whole thing can be themed, plus the game selection menu is attractive and gives sorting options. Game information screens include control schemes and a helpful option to load your last save, and save states now display screenshots and the total time played to help you remember where you were.

Save states are actually an interesting issue. They *should* carry between the VS and your handheld as they're stored on the cartridge, though older ones created on the handheld won't display screenshots on the VS. Broadly speaking, they do, but right now saves created on the arcade cartridges on the VS won't carry across to the handheld. Blaze is aware of the problem and plans to fix it with a system update, but as it stands it's not ideal for those who want to play on the road and then carry on at home. Also, it's worth a reminder that the *Namco Museum Collection* cartridges don't work on the VS due to licensing restrictions, which is a bit of a downer as those carts contain some of the Evercade's bigger names right now.

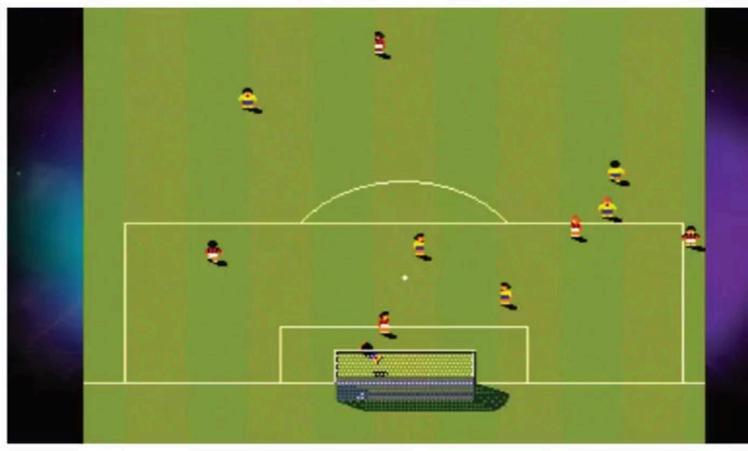
If you haven't yet tried the Evercade, then the VS is a good way to experience the system's library – it's a well-built, affordable machine that's easy to use. The library means that it's best suited to players with adventurous tastes at present, and those who don't desire too much fine control over their visual settings. But if you already own an Evercade handheld, many of the new system software features are coming to your machine too. If you're primarily interested in multiplayer, it's an easy recommendation. But if you're looking for a secondary machine for your TV so you can swap between big screen and small screen play, we'd recommend that you wait and see if the save state compatibility issues can be resolved before taking the plunge. ✱

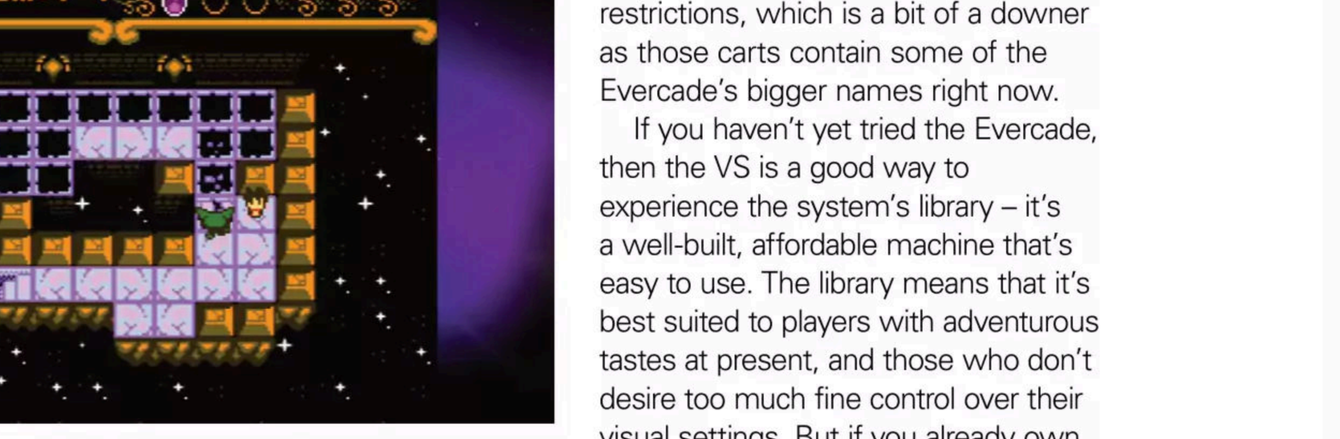
In a nutshell

The VS feels like the next step in the Evercade range, and it succeeds at almost everything it sets out to do. Newcomers will likely enjoy it, but existing handheld owners who don't miss multiplayer might not need it.

»[Evercade VS] Some of the less renowned games included, like *Break Thru*, still offer a good deal of fun.

»[Evercade VS] *Sensible Soccer* on *Codemasters Collection 1* was good on handheld, but it's better with a friend.





»All games are compatible with the Evercade Vs except for the two collections by Namco.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Resident Evil 4 VR

RESI 4 AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE

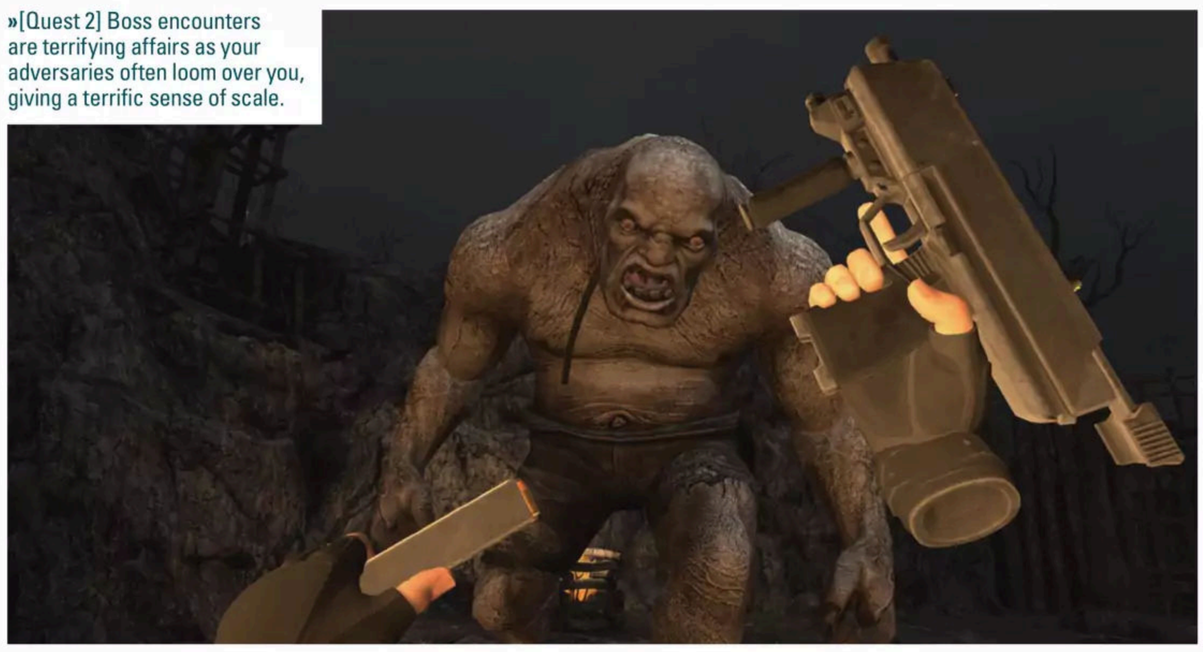
INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** OCULUS QUEST 2
- **ALSO ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £29.99
- **PUBLISHER:** OCULUS
- **DEVELOPER:** ARMATURE STUDIO
- **PLAYERS:** 1

Few gaming cash cows have been milked as heavily as *Resident Evil 4*. But then, few titles are as good as Capcom's acclaimed survival horror game. Originally released in 2005 as a GameCube exclusive, it was clearly too good a title to be confined to Nintendo's console and has been released countless times since, appearing on everything from the PlayStation 2 and Wii to iPhone, PC and Xbox Series X. It's now available exclusively on Oculus Quest 2, but has the move to VR been a beneficial one?

Even if you've completed *Resident Evil 4* countless times in the past, this impressive remaster by Armature Studio will still manage to amaze you. Where previous updates of *Resi 4* have largely been done with the minimal amount of effort, Armature has completely overhauled the classic game to ensure it works in VR – the results are nothing short of staggering. Yes, some elements of the game don't work quite as well, but overall this is *Resi 4* as you've never seen it before and by goodness, it's fantastic.

The biggest change over the original is how your weapons work. Items and weapons are now assigned to various parts of your body so you can grab and wield them in real-time. Physically reloading weapons and aiming them quickly feels second nature and the ability to move and shoot gives you so much more manoeuvrability compared to the original. You can even dual-wield, which greatly changes how you approach combat, but if it's all a little too much there's a more straightforward quick-wield system that lets you select weapons via a more traditional weapons wheel.



»[Quest 2] Boss encounters are terrifying affairs as your adversaries often loom over you, giving a terrific sense of scale.

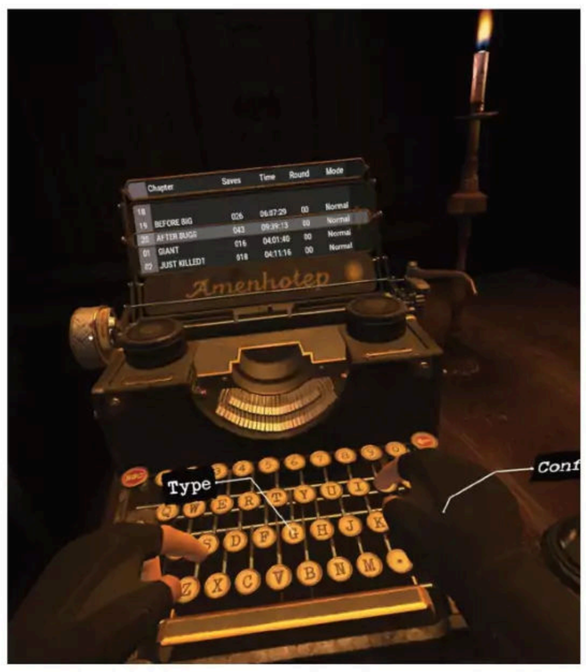
Puzzles have been completely redesigned as well, and they now feel more interactive as you slide blocks around with your hand or press buttons to activate switches or place items. It deepens *Resident Evil 4*'s immersion considerably, none more so when you realise you can now physically type on the game's typewriters when saving progress.

Of course, the downside to this impressive mobility is that the game becomes a lot easier than in the past as you can now strafe past thrown weapons or easily outpace bosses. You can turn strafing off however, which makes it feel more in-line with the GameCube original and presents a greater challenge. In fact, the amount of different options available in *Resident Evil 4* is highly welcome and Armature should be commended for making it as accessible as possible to newcomers of VR, so even if you do suffer from motion sickness you should find an option that's suitable for you. You can also do things like turn off Quick Time Events during cutscenes, disable your weapon's laser sight and much more.

»[Quest 2] The inventory system has been completely restructured and is beautifully presented.

As immersive as *Resident Evil 4* can be, it falters occasionally as cutscenes and certain animations play out on a virtual screen, which can break the flow of the game. However, that's the only real criticism we have as Armature's game is quite simply a must play and a true VR highlight that really shouldn't be missed.

»[Quest 2] Many puzzles have been subtly changed so that they feel more immersive.



In A Nutshell

This is an astonishing remaster that revitalises a classic and familiar game in a way that makes it feels like an exciting, brand-new experience, no matter how many times you may have played it in the past. Simply unmissable.

>> Score **96%**

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

RESIDENT EVIL 4 (GAMECUBE)

▼ SOMETHING NEW

RESIDENT EVIL 4 (XBOX SERIES X)

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Resident Evil 4* debuted in 2005. It revolutionised the series with its focus on action and a new over-the-shoulder perspective that easily allowed you to individually target the body parts of enemies. Originally planned as a GameCube exclusive, Shinji Mikami's game was eventually ported to the PlayStation 2, as well as numerous other consoles. This new version has been completely reworked for VR and now uses a first-person perspective for better immersion.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Resident Evil 4 VR

» Some elements of the script have been cleaned up by Armature to make them less suggestive.

» Disappointingly, The Mercenaries and extra missions like Separate Ways aren't included. You're just getting the excellent base game.

» Ashley's AI has been tweaked so she's less of a hindrance than she was in the GameCube release.

GB Operator

» System: PC, Mac, Linux **» Buy it from:** www.epilogue.co **» Buy it for:** $49.99

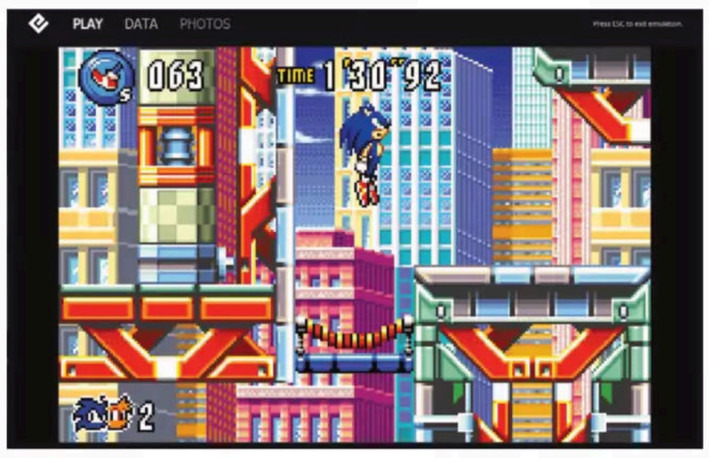
Broadly speaking, emulation is legal, but unauthorised distribution of copyright protected software isn't. This neat little USB device ensures that you can stay well clear of dodgy ROM sites by using your own Game Boy, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance cartridges. Better yet, it allows you to use your existing saved games, back them up and even write your progress back to the cartridge.

Epilogue has provided custom software for the GB Operator with the aim of making the whole experience as user friendly as possible. When a cartridge is inserted, a brief game synopsis is displayed along with a handful of options. As well as playing games via the built-in mGBA emulation core, you can quickly and easily reconfigure your controls, and back-up your games and data at the touch of a button. We found that these functions worked as expected, with a minimum of fuss. Epilogue also says that the device is capable of detecting pirate cartridges, and while we didn't have one to hand to test this, it did correctly identify all of the ones we used as originals.

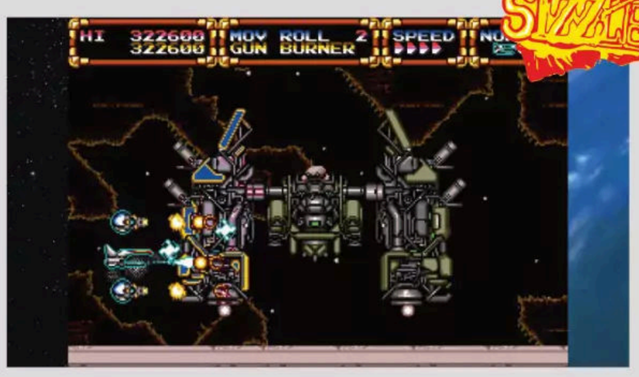
While Epilogue's software is fine if you want to just plug-and-play, it's still under development and right now doesn't offer much in the way of options – at the time of writing, things like software reset and fast-forward functions were planned for the v0.8-beta release. You can install your own Libretro core in place of mGBA, but that will be a bit of a hassle for many. If you're used to having fine control over your emulation, it's better to just use the GB Operator for grabbing the data from your carts for now.

Further features will undoubtedly make the GB Operator a more attractive piece of kit in the future, but for now it performs its basic functions well and cheaply, and in just as small a package as possible. If nothing else, the ability to back-up precious saves could well single-handedly justify the price of admission for many players.

» [PC] Right now it's not possible to configure which mode backwards compatible Game Boy Color games use.



» [PC] The integrated mGBA emulation core offers solid performance across the whole Game Boy family.



Gleylancer

» System: Switch (tested), Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PS4, PS5 **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £5.99

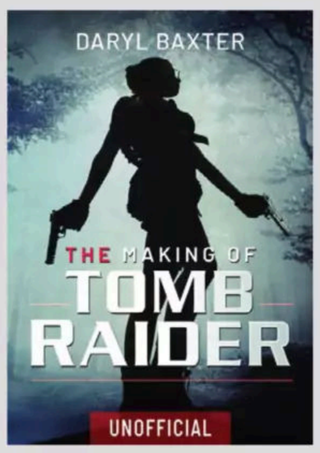
This rare Mega Drive shooter continues to rocket in price, so we're delighted an enhanced, far cheaper alternative is now available. Coded by Shinyuden, the first thing that impresses about *Gleylancer* is the large number of options it boasts. You can adjust everything from the resolution and controls to languages and screen curvature. A new Modern mode gives you all sorts of options, from being able to select different gunners on the fly to even using the right analogue stick to aim them. This mode does make the game quite a lot easier so keep that in mind (especially as you can rewind time). *Gleylancer* is a tough blaster so it's great to see this new release caters to so many types of players. A superb classic shmup has just become even better.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **90%**

The Making Of Tomb Raider

» Buy it from: pen-and-sword.co.uk
» Buy it for: £25



TechRadar writer and past Retro Gamer contributor Daryl Baxter has gone deep on the origins of *Tomb Raider* here, covering the creation and early days of both the game and its star Lara Croft. Over 20 interviewees have contributed their stories and Daryl puts them front and centre, allowing the key players to tell the story in their own words.

There's some really nice visual material such as early concept sketches and trade-show photos, and the book actually goes further than its title suggests with a good chunk of it dedicated to recounting the development of Lara's second acclaimed adventure, *Tomb Raider II*.

Toby Gard is predictably absent from the roster of interviewees and a few linguistic errors have slipped by the editors, but this remains a good read for any *Tomb Raider* fan.

NICHOLAS THORPE

Gynoug

» System: Switch (tested), Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, PS4, PS5 **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £5.99

This is yet another release from Shinyuden, but it doesn't quite impress as much as *Gleylancer* does. While it offers the same staggering number of options, its new modes are a lot less impressive. In fact you're simply given a number of cheat options that allow you to do everything from retain your weapons when you die, to having infinite lives, magic and credits, or becoming invincible. They're fun additions to have, particularly if you've never played this rock-hard shooter in its original Mega Drive incarnation, but it doesn't feel like it has had as much thought put into it as *Gleylancer* has. Still, *Gleylancer*'s rewind function is also included here, so you can quickly loop back and enjoy *Gynoug*'s many gruesome bosses.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **80%**

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

FESTIVE FUN

The team discuss their favourite Christmas gaming memories

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Christmas is fast approaching, and so is everything that comes with it. We're looking forward to sitting down to dinner with our families, a traditionally depressing episode of *EastEnders*, and of course the fun of hunting down gifts and the excitement of receiving them in kind. Of course, gifts often mean games for us, so with that in mind we decided to chat about some of our favourite memories of Christmases gone by.

DARRAN
So we all know that Nick got a GameCube one year, but has anyone ever received another console or computer for Christmas? Mel got me a Mega Drive with *The Lion King* pack-in, which was lovely. Shame I never kept it, as it's now very expensive.

TIM
I never got a console or computer for Christmas, but my brother and I got *Astro Wars* one year. That was pretty cool, though he was much better at it than I was.

NICK
I've usually had them on my birthday, not that the two days make a huge difference. The last one I got for Christmas was the Wii U, and I had to wait nine hours for it to update!

DARRAN
I always wanted an *Astro Wars*. My cousin had one and it was brilliant. So pretty slim pickings for hardware then. What about actual videogames? What did you get?

NICK
I've been really lucky and had quite a few over the years. A couple that really stand out are *WWF Smackdown 2* and *Shenmue II*, I put enormous amounts of time into both. I got *Untitled Goose Game* last year and loved that, too.

DARRAN
What about you, Tim?

TIM
I really don't think I ever received a game for Christmas. My parents didn't like games, so trying to get them to get me an Amiga was a lot of, "But I could use it for homework!" bullshit.

DARRAN
Classic. I used that excuse to get my Amstrad. I got *Power Strike* one year and *RoboCod* another year. Oh and the best was when I told my brother Matt that if he didn't get me *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* then I would disown him.

» [Saturn] Yuji Naka is a big fan of *Lemmings*, and it supposedly inspired him to develop *Christmas NiGHTS*.

> "I told my brother Matt that if he didn't get me The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time then I would disown him"
>
> **DARRAN JONES**

TIM
So did you?

DARRAN
I didn't, but he did give me the game on Christmas Day with the caveat that he'd taken another customer's preorder and that there was probably a little kid crying out there because their copy had disappeared. I still enjoyed playing it, mind.

TIM
That's hilarious!

NICK
That's the true spirit of Christmas – the season of goodwill to all *me*.

DARRAN
Well to be fair, I didn't realise how he got it until it was too late. So what about actual Christmas-based games. What titles have you enjoyed?

NICK
I've actually played a few already this year. *Yakuza* and *Raw Danger* just happen to take place at Christmas, but *Sakura Wars: So Long, My Love* has a proper seasonal section. You get to ask one of the girls out on a date for Christmas Eve in the penultimate chapter, and there's a Secret Santa gift exchange as well.

DARRAN
That's not a bad start, Nick. I've a soft spot for *Christmas Lemmings*, *Moley Christmas* which was an old cover tape and *Christmas NiGHTS*, which I'm surprised Nick hasn't mentioned yet.

NICK
I had that before I had the full game, I love all the real-time clock bonuses *and* Sonic's in it. It's like it was made for me.

TIM
I know it's much maligned but *Dead*

» [Amiga] It was always a real treat to get exclusive Christmas levels for top games on cover disks.

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RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

Rising 4 had some Christmassy stuff in it. But further back – *Die Hard Trilogy*. Well the first part was set at Christmas, not the much better driving bits for the third part.

NICK
Isn't the second film set at Christmas as well?

DARRAN
Quit it. You both know how I feel about people who claim *Die Hard* to be a Christmas movie. Let's get this nonsense back on track. A lot of the proper Christmas games, particularly during the 8-bit years aren't very good at all. Why do we think this is? I'm thinking specifically of *The Official Father Christmas* but I'm sure there are some others.

NICK
Maybe it's because they're created purely for taking advantage of seasonal sales? That's got to lead to awkward deadlines, and I can't imagine developers get really invested in the creative vision.

TIM
I just watched some footage of *The Official Father Christmas*… and wow, shocking. It's quite a niche theme really, probably why they're usually special editions of games or expansions like *Christmas Lemmings*.

DARRAN
You'd normally get gifts with computer mags like *Cannon Soccer* and that *Moley Christmas* I mentioned. Anyone played them?

TIM
Nope.

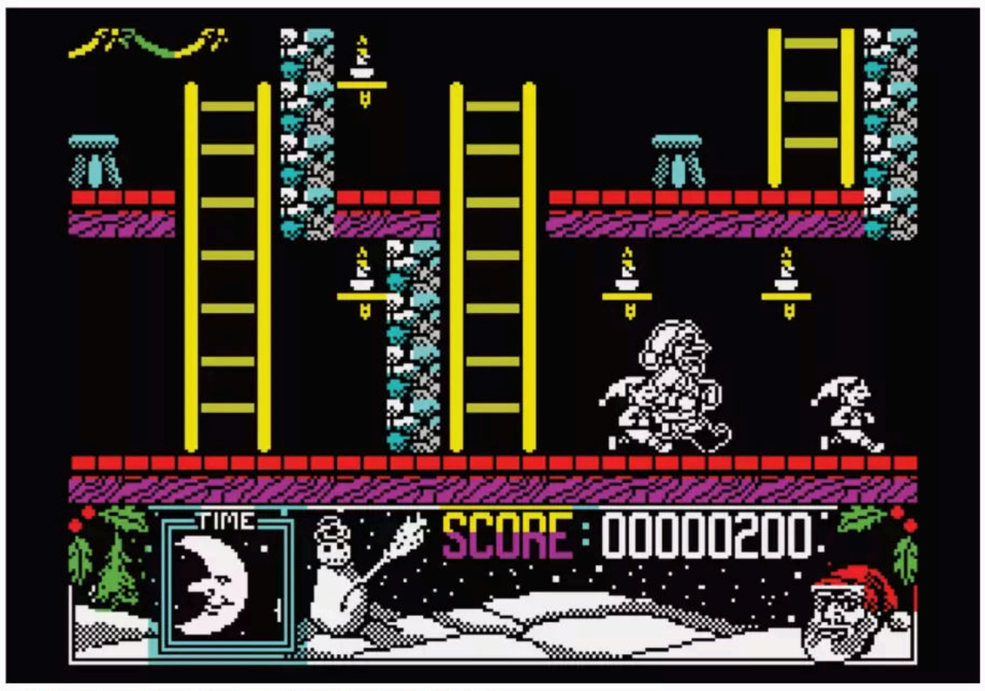
NICK
I'd heard of *Cannon Soccer*, but being a console kid I never actually played it.

DARRAN
So with Christmas just around the corner what are you planning to play over our ten-day break? I'm hoping to complete *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*, which a RLLMUK Secret Santa gifted me.

TIM
I'll probably be playing *Halo Infinite* since it's out in December. You should get the DLC for *Witcher III*, it's not Christmassy, but it is great.

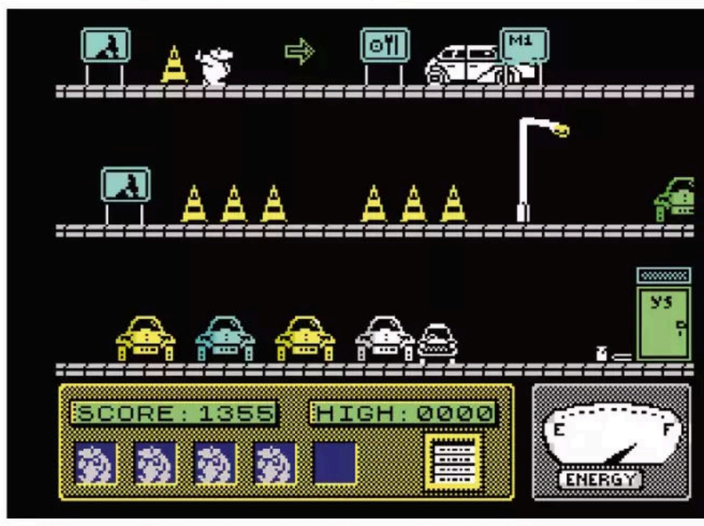
NICK
I'm hoping the Evercade VS won't slip back any further, as I'm looking forward to playing the new carts. We've not had *Gaelco Arcade 1* yet and I really want to spend some quality time with *Biomechanical Toy* and *Alligator Hunt*.

DARRAN
Good choices one and all. Well I think that about wraps things up, so I think the best thing we can take away from this month's chat is that we've been able to discuss Christmas without Nick harping on too much about *Shenmue*. It's a Christmas miracle!

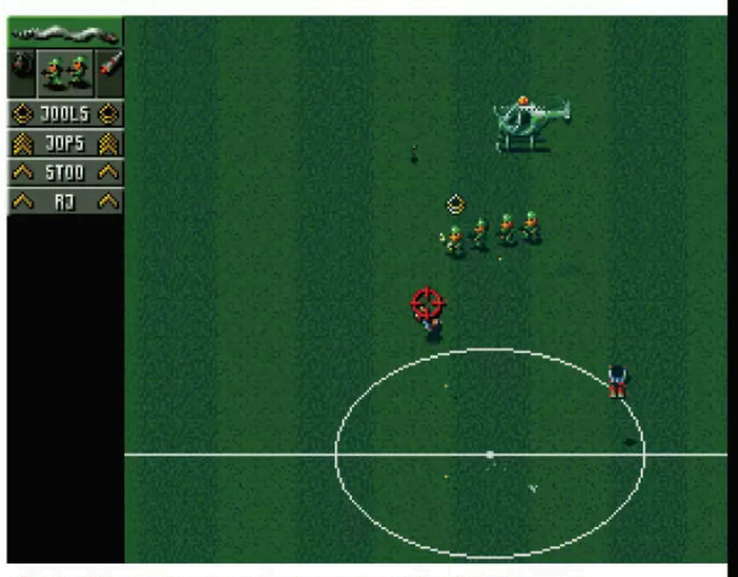


» [ZX Spectrum] A portly chap with an iconic red hat, who squeezes down pipes? A gaming hero like that could never catch on.

» [Commodore 64] Some of our readers have fond memories of annual sessions with games like *Santa's Xmas Caper*.



» [ZX Spectrum] This might not look Christmassy, but Monty Mole is trying to get his latest game to the tape duplicator.



» [Amiga] Plenty of you have fond memories of Sensible Software's excellent crossover gift *Cannon Soccer*.

» [Mega Drive] It might be an average platformer, but selling *The Daze Before Christmas* could pay for plenty of gifts.

READERS REACT

What are your favourite Christmas-themed stages or games?

Barrie Ellis
Absolutely loved *Merry Christmas* from Melbourne House for the C64, in my 1984 Christmas stocking. What a joyous little game. I would love a follow-up.

Stuart Howie
Not going to say it's my favourite but the very obscure *Snowball Sunday* on the C64 always got me in the Christmas spirit when I was younger.

Stoppy
It absolutely has to be *Shenmue*. Hearing the festive tunes and seeing Santa staggering around town. Lovely stuff.

Andrew Neill
Santa's Xmas Caper. It was appalling, but I still played it every Christmas for years!

Goldtingle
I think living the actual Christmas in *Animal Crossing* is particularly emotional (of course the name of the holiday is changed, but the feeling is still the same). Not to mention that back in the GameCube days they gifted you a NES!

Ainsley Bowstead
Ever since my mum made a Christmas card with Sonic wearing a Santa hat as a kid, I can't imagine Christmas without the Ice Cap Zone from *Sonic 3*.

vorn182
Die Hard Trilogy is worth a shout. It's held up pretty well too. I was playing it recently and found it really enjoyable.

Richard D Salih
James Pond 2. Saving Xmas in fun worlds is an utter joy. And it's become a tradition to play it before Xmas for over half my life.

VirtuaOllie64
Christmas NiGHTS was full of great unlockables, like Sonic as a playable character, and the music is so good that it's part of my definitive Christmas soundtrack! I try to play it every Christmas Eve if I can.

Dale Muir
Donkey Kong Country 3 with the MERRY cheat. That was one of my favourite Christmas presents ever!

Tony
I loved *Psycho Santa* on the Amiga – a free cover disk game from Bullfrog with *The One* magazine Xmas 1993. I still laugh at the fart samples (aged 42) as much as I did when I was 14.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

STREET FIGHTER ZERO 3

My favourite version of *Street Fighter*. It still gives me exactly the same pleasure now as back in the day. By the way, I have Gouki's level 3 button combo tattooed on my forearm.

PAID: €590

BIOHAZARD

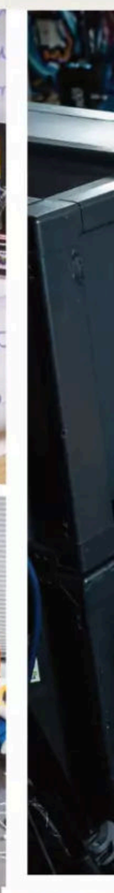
I had no idea what kind of game I was diving into. The PlayStation was very new and this was a new adventure. The game really gave me a new experience.

PAID: €3000

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

Probably the best *Mario* ever. I played this endlessly, so I really needed to include it. I still find it hard to decide which one is better: *Super Mario Bros 3* or *Super Mario World*.

PAID: €1200



BIO

NAME:
Peter Riezebos

LOCATION:
Netherlands

FAVOURITE GAME:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Neo Geo

COLLECTION WORTH:
Before opening 1-2 million Euros (excluding Neo Geo collection). After opening a fraction. Before the end of the project I will give most away again.

TWITCH:
NextNextLevel

EUROS AND EASELS

Peter Riezebos discusses combining two passions

Our latest collector is an unusual one because his games aren't just to enjoy, they're also been picked to entertain others and have inspired his latest art project. Peter Riezebos started playing games in 1990 when he was ten years old. He managed to build up two sizeable collections over the following twenty years, but managed to give most of the games away.

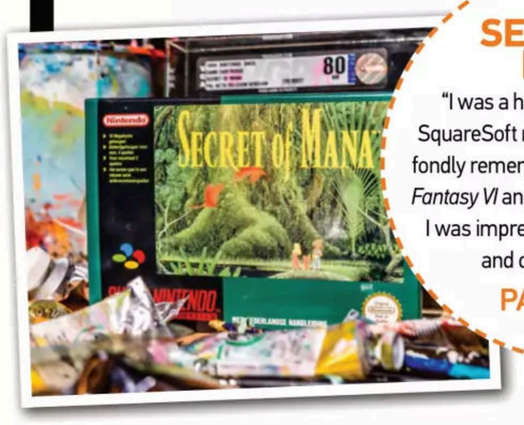
He's now decided to revisit his youth in the form of an art project and interactive stream that you can watch at www.twitch.tv/nextnextlevel. "As part of my art performance and art show, I wanted to replicate my favourite game experiences from my childhood and teenage years," he tells us. Peter wanted to get hold of the 100 games that had made the biggest impact on him, from *Street Fighter Zero 3* to *Ocarina Of Time*, so he began to pick up second-hand copies – only to be dismayed by their quality. "Most were in a bad state, which I experienced as a stain on beautiful memories," he says. "Then and there, I decided to really replicate the experiences by collecting all games new and sealed. Thus only I would be a changing variable, the games would be exactly the same."

Peter's decision has been a costly one. "I spent around 350,000-400,000 Euros to collect all games and all videogame systems in new, sealed and some graded conditions," he tells us. "I bought the same versions that I used to have (*Resident Evil* on the PS1 I bought as *Biohazard* for the Japanese PS1, so I acquired exactly the same version). Over the past few years prices have gone up, so I consider the collection to be worth anywhere between 1 and 2 million Euros (that is before I opened everything)."

So why spend so much money if you're going to open them anyway? "As an artist, I strongly believe that I should only create artworks based on subjects that I have a strong affinity with. In that way I ensure some kind of emotional translation based on intrinsic motivation. Based on the experiences and memories I created paintings. An emotional translation." In addition to being costly, Peter's new collection/project is also a time extensive one. "During the project I am aiming towards completing every game, he tells us, "though this might be a challenge. And for some games, ones that require longer playing like *Final Fantasy VII* and *Ocarina Of Time*, I take multiple streaming sessions."

Considering he's been spending a fortune on videogames, only to open them, we assumed that Peter was strictly for the playing of games over simply collecting them. "Not at all," he clarifies. "I really think every gamer should do as he or she pleases. I used to collect game systems that I would not open. But what I really dislike is the monetary business around games. A financial fixation where non-gamers drive up prices, where market manipulation dominates auctions and media. Games are meant to be played. And collecting for nostalgia and other game-related reasons is beautiful."

Not everyone shares Peter's views however. "Once a seller of graded games told me that I was 'robbing'



SECRET OF MANA

"I was a huge fan of JRPGs and SquareSoft made excellent games. I fondly remember *Chrono Trigger*, *Final Fantasy VI* and *Secret Of Mana*. In *Mana* I was impressed by the soundtrack and overall art style."

PAID: €8000

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

■ One of my favourite *Zelda* games ever. I used to play this a lot at my aunt's (who was a big gamer and completed most 8-bit and 16-bit RPGs on Nintendo hardware). I paid 2,000 Euros, an insane amount since it was 100% new and a red seal label. A copy was recently offered on Ebay for $500,000.

PAID: €2,000

gamers from collecting due to me opening the sealed games. I told him that all the sealed and graded games he sold were out of reach of real gamers. In my opinion he is part of the problem."

Even though Peter's games have exploded in value he's planning to give them away once everything is finished. "The project is really a passion project to celebrate gaming from a gamer and artistic perspective. Straight from the heart," he concludes. "I understand that gaming meant so much more to me that 'just playing a game'. It was almost existential to me." ✱

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

Probably one of the best games ever made. I bought it on the day of release and finished it in one week. In many ways I consider this a masterpiece.

PAID: €2000

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

With over five million sales, Master Chief's first adventure is super cheap on Xbox. You can get it for under a fiver, with the Xbox 360 remaster being similarly priced. The Mac version is a little more expensive and typically sells for **£20.**

LODE RUNNER

If you fancy owning *Lode Runner* on Apple II expect to pay around **£45** for a complete copy. The MSX, Atari 8-bit and Spectrum versions range from **£7-£25,** while the C64 version should be under **£30.**

REZ

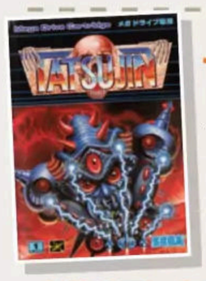
Sega's superb on-rails shooter is slowly rising in price. The PAL Dreamcast version ranges from **£50-£90,** while the Japanese edition is a little cheaper. The PS2 option is easier on the wallet as PAL copies usually sell between **£4** and **£20.**

DARKWATCH

This is slowly rising in price and now reaches as much as **£25** on Xbox. The PS2 version sells for a similar amount.

RAINBOW ISLANDS

If you want to relive Darran's Amstrad experiences you can buy that version for under **£3.** Just be aware that *The Hit Squad* variant is a lot pricier, so seek out the big box edition to save your pennies.



TATSUJIN

A complete Japanese copy of this excellent Mega Drive shmup hits **£65.** The PAL version (*Truxton*) is also rising in price and typically sells for **£40,** while the Genesis version goes for **£100.**

NIGEL MANSELL'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

All versions of this entertaining racing game are relatively cheap, ranging from **£3** to **£25** depending on version and how complete they are. So take your pick and have some fun.

THE FLINTSTONES

Nick certainly doesn't rate this, but if you want it for your collection it's not costly. You can pick it up complete for between **£8** and **£20.**

HOW MUCH?!

DOOM

We know original floppy copies of the id Software shooter reach high prices, but this auction still melted our minds. Fourteen bidders got in a war and the victor paid the princely cost of **£1,850.**

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

PS2 FOR PENNIES

Embracing the market leader didn't mean abandoning the underdogs

Despite the fact that I was a happy PlayStation owner, the PlayStation 2 is not a console that won me over immediately. In fact, there was a time when you could have said that the PS2 represented everything that was wrong with gaming, and I probably would have agreed with you. Most of this was to do with simple bitterness. As a big fan of Sega's swan song I still feel a bit of lingering resentment at the absurd level of hype that accompanied Sony's new console on release. It probably doesn't help that I moved on to the GameCube. In my teenage years, I was truly miffed that my cheap, capable console with fantastic games like *Metroid Prime* and *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* was struggling for shelf space, while the PS2 was sitting pretty with mediocre licensed games and annual sports games at the top of its charts. Honestly, I was a human salt mine at this point in time.

So how the heck did I come to not only own a PS2, but pick up 116 games for it? Well, to be honest, videogames had very little to do with getting it. In 2003, VHS was on the way out and the only DVD player we owned was our PC – not really an ideal situation, since it wasn't in the living room. My mum suggested that we should get a PS2 given that it was also a console, and soon enough we'd taken the plunge. I picked up *WipEout Fusion* because of my love for the series, but make no mistake, the extended editions of *The Lord Of The Rings* films were more of a killer app than any game. But after Christmas, I finally started to warm up to the console – I was given *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* as a present, and picked up *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* in the sales. The GameCube was still my preferred console for multiplatform games, but I did start to pay more attention to the PS2 market.

The conventional wisdom is that great games sell consoles, but with the PS2 I tend to think that the situation was inverted. The initial games weren't great but the console launched with insane sales momentum and never lost it, so if a developer only had the resources to develop for one console, Sony's was the most obvious choice. I had written off Sony's console as being home to derivative World War II shooters and *Grand Theft Auto* wannabes, but there was actually plenty of stuff to satisfy my tastes once I started looking past the most popular games. I personally came to appreciate fantastic exclusive games that were aimed squarely at the hardcore player, like *Gradius V* and *R-Type Final*. On the other end of things, *Sega Superstars* was a hit with my family at Christmas thanks to the EyeToy. While the Wii gets a lot of credit for being a family friendly machine, the PS2 wasn't exactly a slouch in that regard, and the *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* games drew the family in again later on.

But my favourite thing about the PS2 is the output of smaller publishers like 505 Games, Metro3D, Midas Interactive Entertainment and Play-It. While they naturally put out plenty of safe non-branded sports and racing games, they also tended to pick up games that had fascinating concepts, and often released them at budget prices. As great as the Xbox and GameCube were, they couldn't have supported that market in the same way – according to Phoenix Games founder Paul Share, speaking in issue 134 of *Edge*, a budget game needed to hit roughly 50,000 sales to break even. Only the large and diverse audience of the PS2 gave them a realistic shot at that, especially with the more offbeat ideas.

I've been revisiting a few of these games this year, and they're as refreshing now as they were then. *Mr Moskeeto* gives you the chance to spend a summer drinking the blood of an unfortunate Japanese family, and how many games let you do that? *Raw Danger* might be technically rough, but escaping disasters is fun, the overlapping character stories are very ambitious and it gives you the chance to act in some decidedly unheroic ways. Do a little digging, and you'll even find some bizarre localisations. *Tokyo Road Race*? That's actually Taito's arcade racer *Battle Gear 2*. *Fighting Fury* is based on the popular manga *Baki The Grappler*, and you'd never guess from the cover art that *Seek And Destroy* was originally a *Choro Q* game.

Of course, plenty of these games don't play particularly well – *X-treme Express* proves that train racing isn't an amazing idea and *Sky Surfer* shows that extreme sports are dull without things to bump into and fall off of. But I'm a fan of dreadful films like *The Room* and *Fatal Deviation*, so there's plenty of comedy value out there. I played *BCV: Battle Construction Vehicles* on Twitch a few months ago, and while combat between bulldozers is exactly as graceless as you'd imagine, the story was so bizarre that it made for one of the best streams of the year. For similar reasons, I can't wait to share the true disasterpiece *The Sniper 2* with everybody.

I've bought the blockbuster sequels like *Final Fantasy X* and *Metal Gear Solid 2* that failed to sell me on the console 20 years ago, and they're worth playing. But they're not the games that truly warm my heart when I think of the PS2 – give me the 6/10 low budget oddities, thanks. ✱

BUDGET BUY LIST

THE PS2 BUDGET GAMES I'M LOOKING TO PICK UP NEXT

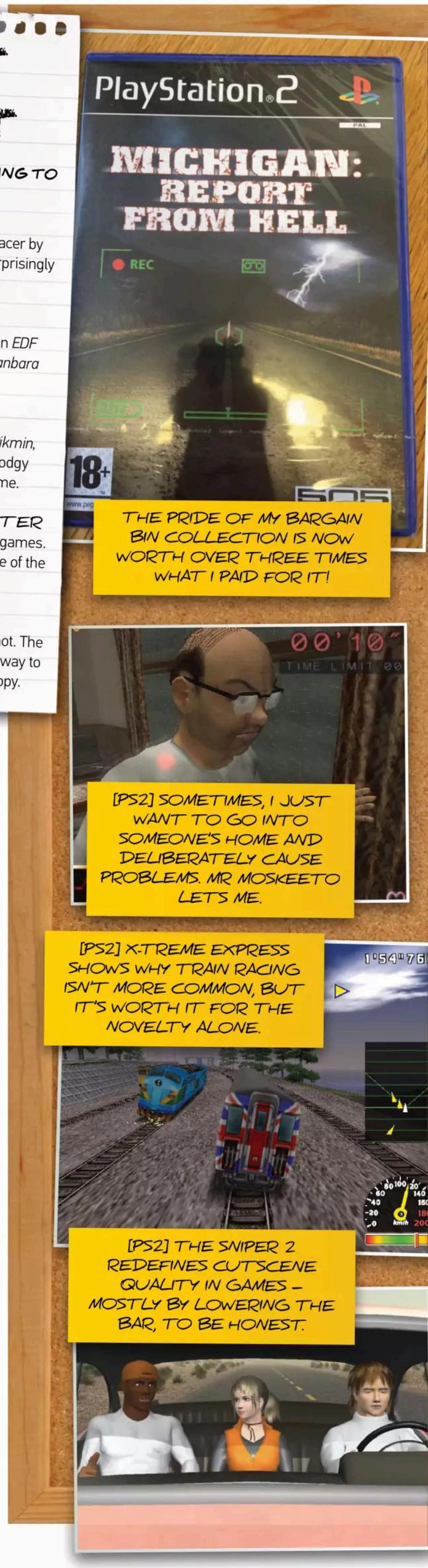
SMASH CARS
This is an accomplished radio controlled car racer by Russian developer Creat Studios, with some surprisingly good graphics given its budget origins.

ALL-STAR FIGHTERS
Look, I just want to see what happens when an *EDF* soldier takes on Aya Misuzaki from the *Onechanbara* series. I think guns beat swords, right?

DARWIN
Have you ever wanted to play something like *Pikmin*, but on the PS2 and with chimpanzees and a dodgy translation? I certainly do, and this is that game.

AIR RANGER: RESCUE HELICOPTER
For some reason, I seem to like disaster-themed games. The idea of taking on rescue missions reminds me of the old Sega game *Air Rescue*, too.

DEMOLITION GIRL
You'd think I would already own this one, but I do not. The concept is so ridiculous that it really has to find its way to my shelves, though. I may ask Darran for his copy.


PlayStation 2
MICHIGAN: REPORT FROM HELL
18+
THE PRIDE OF MY BARGAIN BIN COLLECTION IS NOW WORTH OVER THREE TIMES WHAT I PAID FOR IT!
00'10"
TIME LIMIT 00
[PS2] SOMETIMES, I JUST WANT TO GO INTO SOMEONE'S HOME AND DELIBERATELY CAUSE PROBLEMS. MR MOSKEETO LETS ME.
[PS2] X-TREME EXPRESS SHOWS WHY TRAIN RACING ISN'T MORE COMMON, BUT IT'S WORTH IT FOR THE NOVELTY ALONE.
[PS2] THE SNIPER 2 REDEFINES CUTSCENE QUALITY IN GAMES – MOSTLY BY LOWERING THE BAR, TO BE HONEST.

Earth Defense Forces
0200
0200
AS-18
001/120
[PS2] JUST ANOTHER DAY IN LONDON, IN BUDGET GAME KING GLOBAL DEFENCE FORCE.
[PS2] THE DOG IS ATTACKING THE STEAMROLLER IN BATTLE CONSTRUCTION VEHICLES, AND I AM LOSING MY MIND.
[PS2] EVEN BY TREASURE'S STANDARDS, FREAK OUT IS A WEIRD ONE, AND IT GOT A RELEASE VIA MIDAS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT.
M.WEAPON
S.WEAPON
[PS2] SOMETIMES, YOU JUST NEED TO ACQUIRE DATA. I DON'T DECIDE THESE THINGS, THE DEVELOPERS DO. TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS TO THEM.
44 M
28
44 M
[PS2] COME ON BABY: THE AKACHAMPION HAS WEIGHTED BABIES BEING THROWN IN THE SEA AND FORCED TO SWIM TO THE SURFACE. REALLY.
SONY
PlayStation 2
SONY
SELECT
START
ANALOG

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVOURITE PS2 BUDGET GAMES?

Readers fill us in on their best bargain bin finds

Martin
Ford Racing 3 was very impressive. 60 fps attractive visuals. Varied content. Good handling and a 60Hz mode! Only the audio really let it down. I think it retailed for about £20.

Peter Snoeren
I loved *The Red Star*, a fantastic mix of beat-'em-up gameplay and bullet hell shooter. It's an absolute gem. Another favourite of mine was *Monster Attack*, which was the very first *Earth Defense Force* game released in Europe. Ever since that game, I've been a huge *EDF* fan.

Jason
I really enjoyed *Groove Rider*. It was Scalextric without the licence. Think I got it for eight quid. It was worth about that much.

Daniel Betts
It has to be *Fruit Machine Mania*. There is something strangely compelling about these niche interest PS2 games that were only possible due to the system's install base.

Erik Welleweerd
Michigan: Report From Hell was really good and pretty hard to find nowadays. Too bad I didn't buy the whole stock when they were in stores for only a few Euros.

Carl Harrison
Global Defence Force is easily the best budget game. Saw the glowing review on Game Central (Digitiser at the time) and promptly bought it from my local Morrisons for about £6. I still think it's the best in the series and would love a HD port of it.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

STAR LETTER

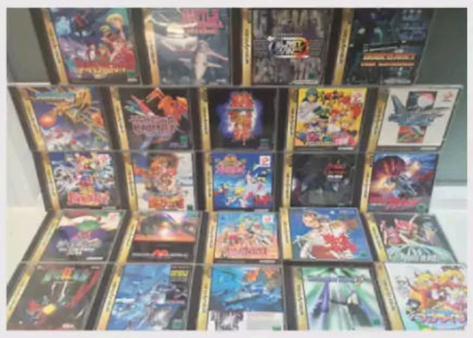
RIGHT IN THE FEELS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I'd just like to say how much I enjoy the new My Retro Life section. I loved how much personal information was in the mags of the Eighties and Nineties because it made me feel like I genuinely knew the writers behind the magazine.

Thanks to My Retro Life I've a better understanding of why Darran loves shmups and import gaming and it's also obvious that he's a big fan of handheld gaming too (something I also enjoy). I've also enjoyed learning about how Nick fell in love with Sonic and his Twitch article was also interesting and it has allowed me to discover a whole new area of gaming I didn't really know existed.

It would be great if we could read about some of the magazine's other staff members as well. I'd love to know why Andy seems so obsessed with PC gaming or what it was like for Martyn Carroll to start the original version of **Retro Gamer**. In short, please don't ever get rid of this excellent section, it's one of the first things I turn to.
Regards,
James Turner

We're glad you like My Retro Life, James. We're happy for other contributors to share their own stories, so we'll see what we can do. We've put a book aside for you. Enjoy.



» My Retro Life allows us to share our passions with you, like Darran's Saturn shmup collection.

» We've been impressed by the original Evercade and haven't found screen bleed to be an issue.

BRIGHT LIGHT!

Dear **Retro Gamer** team,
Your latest issue covering the impending Evercade VS console piqued my interest, as I had bought the portable version a few months back and had yet to unbox it. I eagerly opened the box, charged the portable unit and chose one of the three cartridges which I had purchased.

However, what immediately struck me was the poor screen quality that presented itself front and centre. The low resolution was fine for the games it was showing but the light bleeding from the screen was atrocious. Never had I owned a mobile device with such a poor display. To conclude, there's no way I would recommend the Evercade portable to anyone, even though the selection of games are some of which you won't find on other products, as the screen quality blights the whole experience.

Perhaps the VS console with its reliance on higher-quality TV panels, will negate any of the negatives of its portable brethren. Saving that, get a Switch Lite, load it with collections from Capcom, Konami etc and enjoy portable retro gaming via its extremely good LCD screen.
Kind regards,
Gavin Eke

We've used the Evercade loads and we've never really had an issue with light bleeding, so it's a pity the experience has been ruined for you Gavin, as we feel it's a nifty little system for the price. Having said that, it does feel a little unfair to compare it to a Switch Lite as there's a good three times difference in their price points. Hopefully the Evercade VS will be more to your liking. Nick's certainly been impressed with it so far.

TURTLE POWER

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I have a complete UK set of NES games and also a collection of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* games. I'm not sure if these are any good to use in the Collector's Corner section of the magazine. I also stream on my Facebook page where I try and complete harder games on the original hardware. You can find me under LongviewandFriends.
Kev

That's a nice collection, Kev. Hopefully it didn't take you too long to complete and didn't cost you too much money.

» Kev's collection of NES stuff looks pretty cool. It's pretty good going to get all of them.

ARCADE MEMORIES

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I understand exactly where Iain Lee is coming from when he talks about the constant hunt for tokens in today's arcades. When I trawled the arcades as a kid it was always about discovering new games and seeing how far I could get.

» Places like Arcade Club are proving extremely popular and capture the atmosphere of early arcades.

I discovered games like *Street Fighter II* in holiday arcades, and the reason I have a Sega Saturn is because of a week of being in awe of *Virtua Fighter 2*. Although arcades aren't the same today there has been an attempt to replace them with the various arcade bars that have started cropping up.

What are your thoughts on these and do you think it's something we'll see more of in the future?
Regards,
Luke Middleham

Arcade bars are certainly becoming more popular Luke, in fact we've featured one in this very issue. While arcades have changed a lot from the old days, they still manage to offer experiences you can't easily get at home. It's just a shame they're not always experiences everyone wants.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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» [PC] If you enjoyed playing *Ape Escape* on the PlayStation, you might want to try out Yahya's remake.

GOING APE

Good day Darran,

I just wanted to let you know about my *Ape Escape* fan game that I have been working on for the past couple of months in my free time and which I've finally released. I thought it might be something cool enough to write about. You can find it at bit.ly/aperemake.

Yahya Danboos

Thanks for writing in, Yahya. We'll certainly take a look at this as we were big fans of *Ape Escape* on the PlayStation back in the day.

SAMUS CELEBRATION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Don't you think the time is right to put Samus on the cover of our beloved magazine? While Nintendo and the whole world are absolutely right to praise the 2D *Dread*, why not focus on coverage of the fantastic *Prime* series instead? There's not a single book or article out there covering these wonderful games as everyone seems to only write about *Super Metroid*. I will not even ask for *Federation Forces* to be included! I know you're the only ones who can accomplish this task for me.

Gabriele, an extremely loyal subscriber from Zebes.

» [Wii] Gabriele would love us to look at the *Prime* series, but it's OK to avoid *Federation Force*.

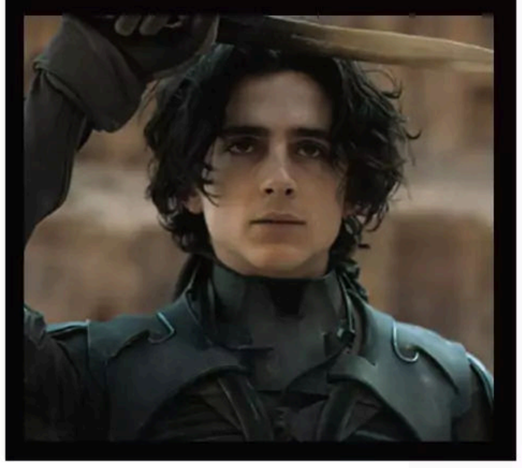
We're glad you're keeping the *Metroid* love going, Gabriele. If we can get suitable access we'd be happy to put *Metroid Prime* on the cover. We'll try to sort something out when *Metroid Prime 4* finally arrives.

» [PC] Trundling around in *Halo*'s Warthog certainly left a big impression on many of you.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Back to the cinema

Most of the team enjoy a good trip to the cinema and the release of *No Time To Die* has certainly opened the gates. Nick's been content to wait for things to arrive at home, but Darran and Andy are big fans of being in (a preferably empty) cinema and watching the likes of *Dune* and *No Time To Die* on the big screen. James Bond's latest outing probably wasn't worth the long delay, mind.



Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite moment from Halo: Combat Evolved?

Jonathan Keen
The Flood encounter. Meeting these abominations for the first time really turned the game on its head.

Rev Phil Richardson
That moment when you played multiplayer for the first time and your mate is driving the Warthog and says, "Hop in the back and use the gun…"

Jeremy Powers
Getting that first Warthog and the freedom of exploring this world… and just… GOING. It may seem closed off by today's standards, but it felt like a massive world had opened up for me back then, which I still love to return to from time to time!

James Harvey
The final mission when you're in the Warthog and the music is getting more and more intense as you get towards your destination – a proper heart-pumping moment!

Demi-Fiend
LAN party, Blood Gulch, Capture The Flag.

Steven Hall
For me it's the first level when the Covenant boarded the Pillar Of Autumn. It reminded me of the opening of *Star Wars* when the Stormtroopers boarded Princess Leia's ship!

Chris
The final mission escaping on the Warthog. The music getting more intense as you get further into the level.

jeffsretrogaming
Stepping out of the crashed Pelican on the 2nd level 'Halo' and looking around to see the amazing skybox and view of the ring. Definitely a 'wow' moment that I still revisit on occasion.

Kevin D
I'll never forget the first time I encountered the Flood. That flipped that game from an action game to a horror game real quick, I had never really seen that before.

Renegade
Any time you get in the Warthog in co-op campaign. It's just so much fun.

Eurisko
When you realise you don't know what all the fuss was about. Sorry.

Cubism
Looking up at the Halo as it wraps around the sky. The sheer scale of it was mind-blowing at the time.

Withnailmarwood
Spending 45 minutes looking at the grass when you landed on the planet. There was nothing else close to how good this looked at the time on consoles.

James Dawson
Realising just how overpowered the pistol was and never swapping it for another weapon ever

retro GAMER

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

ISSN 1742-3155

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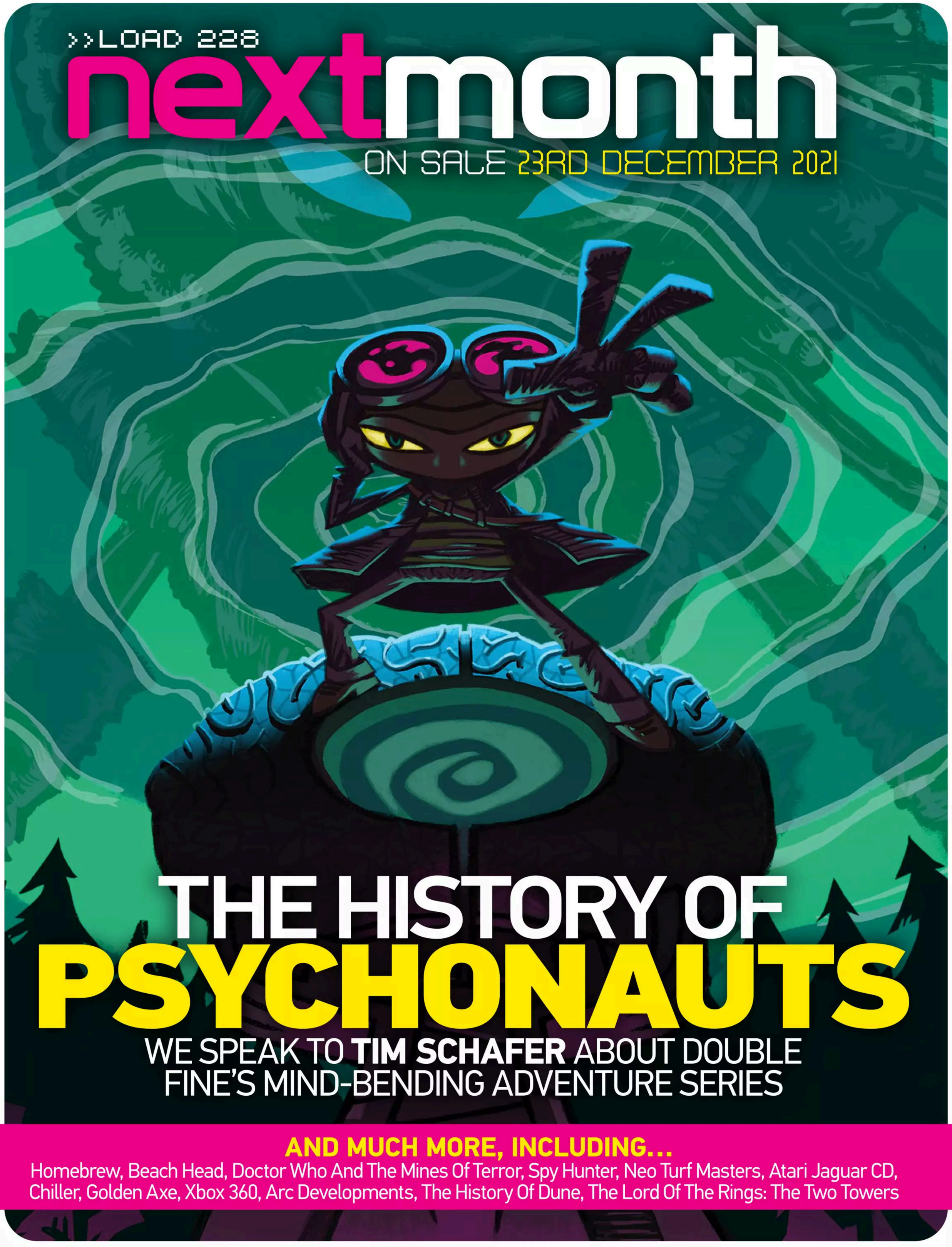

THE HISTORY OF PSYCHONAUTS

WE SPEAK TO **TIM SCHAFER** ABOUT DOUBLE FINE'S MIND-BENDING ADVENTURE SERIES

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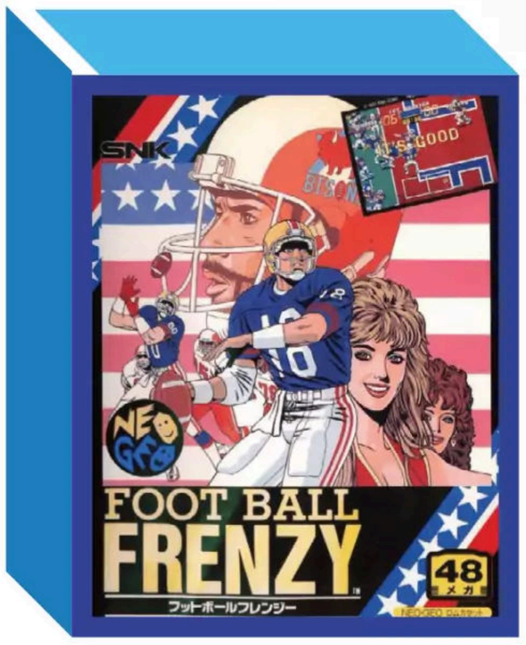
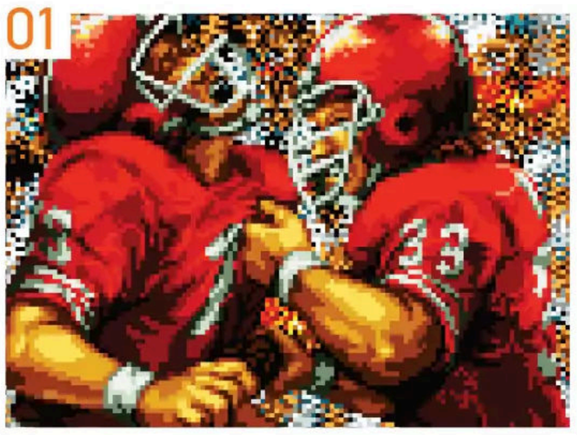


FOOTBALL FRENZY

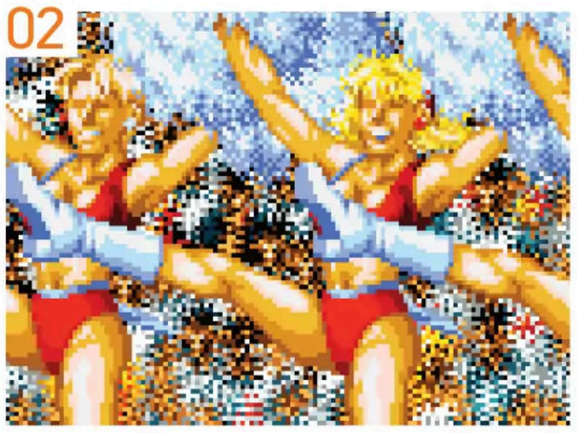
» You know how it is, with those professional sports people and their professional sports. Often, their day jobs involve a lot of running, and you don't get that good at running unless you have something to run away from. So it goes for Jimmy Tightend, a tight end whose behaviour on the field recently has been concerning his fellow players. Let's skip to the end and find out why...

01



» Jimmy Tightend has just fumbled a pass and possession has turned over as a result. That draws the ire of quarterback Johnny Quarterback, who berates Jimmy. "Get it together, man! We have to win this game, for her sake!"

02



» As the defensive players take the field, Jimmy passes the cheerleaders. Ah, the cheerleaders. What would football be without them? They're an essential part of any game, with their choreography, their skirts, and their...

03

» It's all too much for Jimmy Tightend. The mental anguish causes him to collapse into a heap on the touchline, curled into the foetal position. The crowd, his teammates and the TV crew all look to him as he wails, "Jenny, Jenny!"

04

» A flashback begins. "Look at me, Jimmy! I'm really gonna do it," says Jenny Cheerleader. Jimmy shouts back, unable to move. "Don't do it, this is madness! There's no way you can pull it off!" It's too late. A tragic pom-pom accident costs Jenny her life, and Jimmy his girlfriend.

05

» Jimmy returns to his feet and roars in anguish. "Why? Why must my only natural talent force me into a career that is so maddeningly full of cheerleaders?" But nobody's watching now. The defence have just scored a touchdown from an interception. Jimmy Tightend is going to the Super Bowl.

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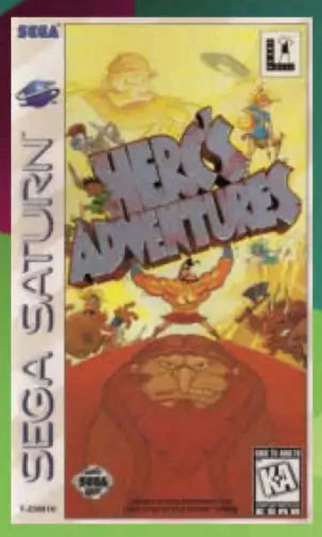

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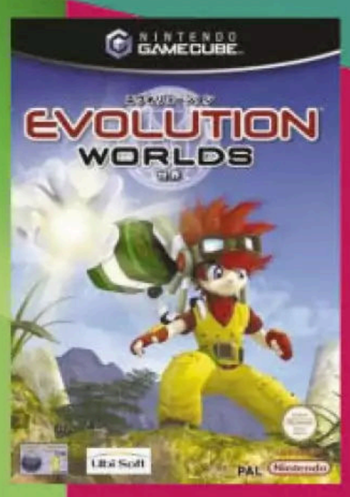

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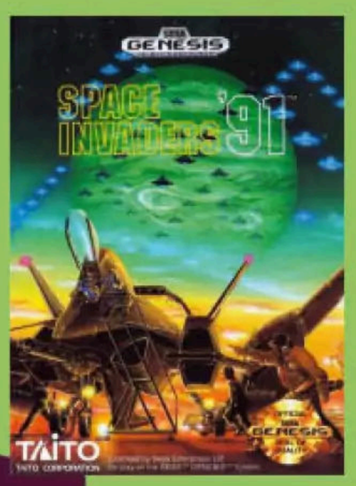

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